

to burn with desire and keep quiet

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/34436593) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/34436593>.

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| Rating: | Explicit |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | M/M |
| Fandom: | Video Blogging RPF |
| Relationship: | Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound , Clay Dream & GeorgeNotFound & Sapnap |
| Character: | Clay Dream , GeorgeNotFound , Sapnap |
| Additional Tags: | Introspection , Mutual Pining , Sexual Tension , Long-Distance Friendship , Codependency , Ambiguous Relationships , Past Internalized Homophobia , Angst and Fluff and Smut , Praise Kink , First Meetings , Roommates , Brief References to Social Drinking , Minor Injuries , Discussion of Mental Health , Sharing a Bed , Feelings Realization , Kissing , Frottage , Confessions , Romance , Friends to Lovers , Relationship Study , Character Study , Slow Burn , Happy Ending |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 1 of in poetry, we reside |
| Collections: | favourite dsmp fics :') , dnf , scrumdiddlyumptious |
| Stats: | Published: 2021-10-11 Completed: 2021-11-16 Chapters: 4/4 Words: 47679 |

to burn with desire and keep quiet

by [falsettodrop](#)

Summary

You should be here, Dream thought, as he considered George's micro expressions. Every inch of him ached with that belief; he trembled with how much he wanted it, how terrified he was of it.

Varying degrees of togetherness, in four parts.

Notes

To burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves.

—Federico García Lorca

This is a story about longing.

S/o to my friends who have been supportive of my writing for months and gave me endless encouragement. I love you all a lot. And of course, most notably, a big thank you to my

friends who looked over this before I posted; without your feedback, this would be a lesser beginning.

Listen along to [this playlist](#) as you read for a greater experience.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

from miles away

Sometimes Dream felt like if he basked in the most insignificant thing for a long time, he could find magnificence in it; if he looked at anything enough and thought about it, *really* thought about it, he could find beauty within it. Right there, right at the core. Right at the heart.

Sometimes he looked at people and found things they probably never intended to be found. Those were unforgettable moments which he didn't share with anyone but the sanctuary of his own mind. When he fought with Sapnap, his head pounding and blood racing, and heard his best friend cursing at him with fleeting vitriol, he would think to himself, *you're so passionate and stupid and you mean so much to me*. When George pushed his buttons for a laugh, nagged for his attention during times where he was needed for more pressing, important matters, he thought to himself, *you're ridiculous and special and I wouldn't have it any other way*.

Sometimes he looked at the ceiling—laid in his bed, over the covers, and sunk into the mattress entirely—and he thought to himself, *this roof over my head could collapse on me any second, in all technicality, but by some miracle it doesn't and I am safe under it every day*.

He had endless gratitude, almost to a fault. He saw the good in every single thing. It was one of his gifts.

He didn't know why his brain worked how it did. He just knew it made him feel like he was running a never-ending one-man marathon, but it was awesome despite the exhausting nature of it.

A bout of static flickered his mind away from his mindless thought processes. George's voice filtered through his speakerphone, tinged with the need to sleep: "What are you thinking?"

They had not spoken for forty minutes, Dream busy with writing a proposal and George doing... well, whatever George did. Usually it was avoiding editing, or working on a thumbnail, or haphazardly picking apart code, or scrolling through whichever app on his phone he was newly obsessed with. TikTok was the current favourite. Dream had switched to his phone during their silence, preferring to lay in bed rather than sit in his gaming chair doing nothing.

"Me?" Dream asked, and his brain, like magic, relaxed when he heard George's voice. "Oh, nothing."

George scoffed into his mic. "Liar."

Dream sighed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "It wasn't important."

"Don't care," George said, which was a lie because if he didn't care then he'd just let it go. "Tell me or I'm leaving."

Dream rolled his eyes. He didn't feel like explaining the inner workings of his mind at this hour, so his mind settled on something else. "You're annoying," he stated, then continued before George began complaining again: "Thinking 'bout my mom. She'll be over tomorrow."

George hummed, satisfied with an answer. "What will you be doing?"

"Meal prep," Dream answered, easily. That was the plan, at least. "She told me that she wanted to watch a movie with me and Nick, so probably that after. I dunno."

"Oh," George replied, sounding strange. In a drier, uninterested tone, he added: "How..."

interesting.”

“So interesting,” he said, to fill the silence.

“Quite nice,” George continued, sarcasm dripping from each syllable, “how *splendid*.”

Dream knew he was joking, but the way George was saying it made him feel uneasy. “Yeah.”

George went quiet after that for a few seconds, and the air went thick, if that was even possible over their distance. Dream wondered what was going on in George’s head. From time to time, he wondered if George got sad when Dream told him these anecdotes, and then he realized that *of course* he might feel sad. But that also prompted him to wonder if George enjoyed hearing these things to begin with, if he even wanted to know. Was it better knowing what you were missing out on, or not knowing you were missing out on something at all?

The silence was killing him, so Dream asked, to dissipate the uneasiness in the air, “What about you? Do you have plans tomorrow?”

He could hear through the mic when George swallowed against his dry throat. “Um, no.”

It was quiet again, which scared him. It wasn’t the comforting kind of quiet that usually possessed his calls with George—this one was uncomfortable, tense. It was the kind of silent George went when he had a lot of feelings but didn’t know how to put them into words, so instead he just internalized it and never spoke about it again.

He hated when George got like that, but he liked to think he understood George better than anyone else. That he could pry out the hard parts, the things he was too afraid to voice out loud. George didn’t always want to be pushed, though—actually, *a lot* of the time George didn’t want to be pushed, and Dream was good at pushing George when he needed to be, but he didn’t think this was one of those moments.

Still, he wanted to know. He always wanted to know every piece of George, even at the times he didn’t wish to share. He wanted to know all the parts of him, even the ugly ones. Especially the ugly ones.

What is going on inside your head, George? He wondered, tapping his phone against his stomach, absentminded. He considered asking, but knew it was fruitless tonight. Not the time. It didn’t feel right, at least not yet.

Instead, he picked up his phone and looked at the time, reading *1:13*. One in the morning, he thought, and his brain converted their time difference without fail—add five hours, so it was six in the morning for George. “Hey, it’s late for you, isn’t it?”

He heard George let out a breath, like he’d been holding it inside him for a while. “Uh. Yeah, it’s six. I mean, it kinda always is.”

He thought about that for a moment. *It kinda always is*. George always adjusted himself for him, for *them*; Dream didn’t know how to deal with that fact, sometimes. He always said he had a hard time expressing his feelings, but Dream thought he was doing a pretty good job showing it. “Gonna sleep soon?” Dream asked, tone soft.

Another hum. “Are you?”

Dream chose not to answer; he wasn’t tired—he was relaxed, and still felt sort of awake—but he could tell from the way the ends of George’s words were mildly slurring into each other that he

was about to pass out. He didn't want George to stay up for him, not when he seemed so exhausted. "You sound tired, George. Time for bed."

George sighed, the fight having left. "Will you stay?"

Dream couldn't help it; he smiled. "I'll lie in bed with you," he murmured, wishing he could reach out and run a hand along George's arm, some form of comforting motion.

On any other night George might've made a joke of it, but tonight all he said was, exhausted and overworn: "Alright, Dream."

George took him to bed, via his phone. Dream wondered if George could hear the sound of his air conditioning blasting through the call, the same way Dream could hear the sound of George's fan on his end. He quite liked the sound of it mixed with George's breathing, evening out, until it was slow and steady. He thought about George for a long time before he fell asleep that night, longer than he usually did. For a good hour, he listened to George there with him, wished for a time where they could do this for real, where he could reach out and George would be *there* with him, real in the flesh. He wondered if George thought about him like this sometimes, too. He liked to think that yes, he did think about him like this, in the same manner, with the same feeling. He liked to think that—

And he was out, deep in slumber. He dreamt that night of warm hands clutching at his bicep; of dark hair, unruly, against the white of his pillowcases. He dreamt of George, there with him.

They were in Dream's bed, had fallen asleep there and woken together. The sun-rays shining through his open bedroom curtains were to blame for his early rise to consciousness.

Eyes fluttered open, and he was greeted with the sight of George's brown eyes, staring wide without shame.

"What are you looking at?" Dream asked, throat husky and unused.

George's hand reached over, feathering lightly over the slopes of his face, caressing him with a care Dream didn't know George possessed. He was so delicate about it, so quiet, so thoughtful. Dream no longer knew how to breathe.

"You are so beautiful," George whispered into the morning light, so readily, that it had to be a dream. His George didn't give up feelings so easily.

"You can't just say that," Dream replied tiredly, feeling bashful. He batted George's hands away, hiding into his pillow. "Who are you, and what have you done with George?"

"I'm here," George said back. "I've always been here, looking. Don't you know?"

It felt poignant, those words. Dream didn't know what to do with them, didn't know how to interpret the truth within them. It felt strange, hearing George say such a thing to him, so blatant in its honesty. He shut his eyes, overwhelmed with the feeling.

"I can't stop thinking about you," Dream whispered back, eyes closed, taking this chance to admit to his sins, like it was some unknown secret instead of an obvious fact. "I think I'm obsessed with you."

George was silent, but when Dream opened his eyes, he smiled at him, knowing, no trace of smugness in his expression whatsoever. "You think?"

Dream bit his lip, embarrassed. "I know. I don't hide it well. Sorry." Sorry, sorry, he kept thinking.

George made a put-out sound, at the base of his throat. Soothingly, George said, "Don't apologize for that."

"You don't want it, though," Dream replied, forlorn. He looked at George with sad eyes, trying to convey how apologetic he was for feeling this way toward him, toward his best friend, who never asked to be put in this position.

George sighed, thumbing at his cheek. "Oh, Dream," he said, leaning forward. He pressed his forehead against Dream's, the heat of his skin burning him, lighting him up from there, downwards, until his entire body felt like it was engulfed with flames. I want you, Dream thought, like he was losing it. Please, he chanted in his mind. "You still have no idea what I want, do you?" Still? Dream wondered, and it felt significant, like he was missing an essential piece to this conversation and couldn't quite figure George out entirely. And then George's mouth ghosted the corner of Dream's—he could feel him there, breathing on him, and alarm bells went off in his brain. He was close, so fucking close, close enough to—

Dream shuddered, and woke up.

Despite his namesake, he could never recall his dreams in the mornings. He was sure that he dreamt about George often, though; sometimes he could remember the ghost of his warmth next to him, the comforting feeling of sweet words directed at him, washing over him. He never remembered what was said, but he knew he often imagined George with him. It felt inevitable to him at this point, considering how much he daydreamed about being with him. There was not much to think of it, at least not in his opinion. Of course he dreamed about George; that was his best friend. It was not abnormal to dream about a person you spent so much time with.

Unusual for them, Dream texted George for hours the next day. It wasn't that he and George didn't talk a lot during their days—they often did spend hours together, either alone or with others, being productive together, chatting, playing games, or simply existing in the same realm. But they didn't *text* often, at least not for hours at a time; usually they found it better to sit in voice call together instead, but they didn't have the option with his mother and Sapnap occupying his attention.

It was non-stop, every time his mom and Sapnap weren't paying attention to him. He even excused himself to the bathroom to check his phone twice.

He didn't know why he couldn't step away, just that he felt it to be important. Like he needed to show George that he was a vital part to Dream's day too, regardless of if he had plans that George couldn't be included in physically. He needed George to *know*. And, weirdly, he thought George might appreciate it—that he might need the reassurance, too.

didn't you have things to do today? George texted him, after a few hours had passed and Dream was not letting up.

I'm doing those things, Dream replied, much too quickly. He added for good measure: *but I wanna*

talk to you too.

George didn't say a thing for a few minutes; Dream kept checking his phone for a response. He bit his lip, thinking. Was it too much, saying that? Could it be taken in the wrong way?

Eventually, his phone buzzed. All it said was, *stop ignoring them to chat with me.*

but I like talking to you, Dream said, swift in response again.

George didn't take very long to reply to that. *if i was there, would you still do this?*

The question took him a bit by surprise. All he could manage was, *then you'd be with us too. obviously.*

do you want me there with you? George asked, and that was in contention for being the dumbest question Dream had ever had directed at him. Ever, point-blank. But he also knew George didn't need it answered, not really—he was just asking for reassurance, in his own way.

you're dumb if you think I don't, Dream replied anyway. He didn't enjoy dwelling on it, the fact that George was so far from him, that there were laws restraining them from being together. *if you were here, I'd probably still ignore them for you.*

He handed his popcorn to Sapnap, who didn't bother sparing him a glance. His own mother was engrossed in the movie, but Dream couldn't even recall the plot.

simp levels off the charts, George had said, when Dream checked his phone a few minutes later. *not even there and i'm living in your head rent-free.*

For some reason, Dream felt unaffected. Because somehow he knew: *don't act like you wouldn't ignore them for me too.* And added, because knowing this fact made him feel so self-satisfied: *you do it all the time anyway.*

It was a blatant lie, but George responded: *no i don't i'd never do that.* In another text: *i hate you actually.*

you loveeeee me, Dream typed with his thumbs, trying to suppress a smile. *c'mon just admit it. i don't particularly enjoy lying.*

Dream rolled his eyes. *says the man who just lied saying he hated me .*

and i meant that, George said. *i hate you so much.*

It made him feel tingly, whenever George told him he hated him. Because Dream understood that what he actually meant was that he loved him, and it felt almost *good* when George said those words. He was almost admitting it by default, by it meaning the opposite. He could feel the true meaning behind it.

you do know when you say that I read it as I love you instead?

not my fault ur an idiot who can't read, George replied, unbothered.

Dream stifled a laugh, not wanting to bring attention to himself, but Sapnap looked over by chance at that very instance. "Who are you texting?"

He glanced away, caught. The tips of his ears went hot, and he knew they looked red to anyone

with eyes. He blushed much too easily.

“Just George,” he replied, but offered no further information. Sapnap’s eyebrows went up a hair, but he said nothing further, returning to the movie. Dream didn’t like that. It felt like Sapnap thought something, then chose to say nothing. He didn’t do that often, at least not with Dream.

They weren’t being quiet, so his mom heard them speaking from her loveseat. Without looking away from the movie, she said to him, “Could you tell him I said hello?” She paused, then looked at Dream’s face, and said thoughtfully, “It’ll be nice when he can join us one day.”

Dream smiled. His mom always knew what to say. “Yeah. I’ll tell him.” Ignoring George’s previous messages, he sent: *mom says hi, she wishes you were here too.*

too? He said first, then, *that’s nice of her.*

in addition to sap, not me, Dream clarified, simply to annoy him.

i’m sure, George texted back. *don’t act like you don’t want me to yourself.*

Dream read the message once, then twice, then three times to make sure. Paused for a long moment. Swallowed, then typed, *you wish,* before shoving his phone into the pocket of his sweatpants.

It didn’t vibrate for another hour.

George didn’t often sleep at night—neither Dream nor George’s night, at least. This meant that on occasion, it could be one in the afternoon and he’d be curled up in bed and stubbornly refusing to give in to himself, sleep deprived and rambling into the phone while Dream made himself breakfast, or went through his emails, or relaxed. Dream wasn’t sure why, but those were some of the best moments: when he was wide awake, nothing better to do than listen to George sleepily rant at him for hours, him leading the conversation and Dream giving input every now and then. Most days George rambled about inconsequential things—a random subject his sister mentioned over call, a dumb comment he saw under a Twitter thread, how his laptop crapped out on him in the middle of an email and it was lost forever—but sometimes he spoke about important things, things that came from the heart. Those were his favourite.

This particular afternoon, Dream chose to sprawl out on his couch, petting Patches who had situated herself atop his ribcage and fallen asleep. The best part of it was her paw, resting over his phone screen which he had lying on his chest, and he was sure she could hear George emitting from it. He felt impossibly fond having them like this; it felt almost as if he was being weighed down by the sound of George’s tired voice and his dozing cat, two of his favourite things.

“D’you think things’ll be different,” George said to him, voice partially muffled by speaking into the pillow, “after we meet?”

“Nah,” Dream said, voice quiet because he didn’t want to wake Patches. Frequently, he was asked this question, both by friends and family and fans, but he and George didn’t often discuss it. The thing was, the energy between them already felt like so much all the time—they both felt a lot, albeit in different ways, and they both thought a lot, in similar and opposing ways too—but somehow, it remained natural between them. Dream didn’t think that would change, should they meet in real life; in fact, he thought it would be easier, he’d be able to reach out and ruffle George’s

hair when he was in a particular mood, or he'd be able to press their shoulders together in a sign of comfort. It would be the same when they met, he believed it—a lot to handle, but still them at its essence.

He didn't know how to put these thoughts into words without scaring George with the paralyzing inevitability of it all. Instead, he said: "I think it'll be the same for us, but like, extended? More, because it's in person? To be fair, we'd just talk and argue. The only change is it'll be in front of each other. Right?"

Sometimes Dream spoke, and he wasn't sure if he believed what he was saying. Did he mean it, or was he trying to convince himself as some form of self-preservation?

The thought of George being close enough to touch terrified him, because if he got to touch, then how would he know when to pull away? It was the only thing he was scared of, in regards to meeting him. He didn't want to want it too much, but he felt like he was past the point of return.

George sighed over the line. Dream didn't know if he agreed, because he didn't answer—instead, he asked: "D'you get freaked by... expectations, I guess, that people have for us? Not only the fans, I mean, like. Everyone."

"Like, for how we'd act?" Dream asked, carefully, wondering if this was connected to what George had said before.

"Not that," George mumbled. "Or, not just that. I mean in general. I don't want to disappoint anyone."

"You wouldn't disappoint me." He didn't know if that was what George needed to hear, but he hoped it would help. Dream wondered if the original topic of conversation was relevant here, if the subjects were connected, or if George was being aimless in his rambling.

"You sure?" George asked, quiet, sounding unsure. His voice went more serious, and he added, "Sometimes it freaks me out, y'know, thinking about how many people are watching us, 'nd how closely they're watching. I dunno."

"I get what you mean." It was rare George opened up about this stuff, but Dream could tell he was talking about the pressure of having a platform at their scale. Dream knew that he got the worst of it amongst the three of them, it was an indisputable fact. "It can be, uh, uncomfortable. Obviously amazing, but overwhelming."

"S'a bit overwhelming, yeah," George replied, tiredly amused at the understatement. "'Specially for you."

Dream exhaled, turning up into a laugh. "I deal."

"You deal with *everything*," George pointed out, softly. "I dunno how you do it."

"I have you," he replied easily, because he was alright and it didn't do much to dwell on it, "to distract me. And Sapnap to defend me. And Bad to cry to, if I need advice." And the others, if he wanted to feel surrounded by friendship and focus on nothing but the positives. Each of his friends played an important role in his life, in how he dealt with everything. He obviously had his *best friends*, but he needed different people for different things. It didn't mean anything less; they cared for him the same, but expressed it how they knew best.

"Sometimes I feel like—" George cut himself off, but it lingered in their call, like he wanted to finish but needed Dream to ask first.

“Like?” Dream prompted.

“Like,” George started, then breathed in deep, before he continued, “you’re the only one who really knows me.”

Dream huffed. It felt good to hear that sort of thing—*God*, it felt so fucking good—but a part of him didn’t know how true it could be. “What about Nick? And Alex?” *Or even Karl, or Bad, or—*

“I love them,” George admitted, honest and free, and the strength behind his words took Dream by surprise, and he continued: “’nd yeah, they do know me. But—with you, it’s different. I’m different.”

Dream sat in the confession for a long moment, revelled in it. He understood what George meant, when he said that he felt like only Dream knew him. Dream felt the same in return. The truth was for both of them, they knew parts of each other that would be odd to share with anyone else.

They were both different around each other. Always had been, for years of their lives, but even more so the past year in particular. Under the surface, the energy between them sizzled; he could hear it if he listened close enough, but most of the time he didn’t care to pay attention to it. A long time ago, Dream accepted the nature of his friendship with George was simply *different*; there was no method of explaining it, why they acted like this around each other, about each other, *to* each other. All his friends were important, but George being important felt different. Around him, the pressure to perform didn’t exist, and he could go quiet and soft and unguarded without the fear of being questioned. But also around George, the fire within him lit bright and ferocious; nothing wound him up more than George, and that included Sapnap who often talked smack in direct line of Dream’s face.

George got under his skin like no other. He slithered under his flesh and found home and refused to get out, stubborn in nature, and Dream couldn’t feel mad about it. Even when George made him angry, he thrived in it. He could go from yelling at him over an argument to admitting quiet, personal thoughts in the span of an hour. The fire could be lit and prodded at or left to a quiet, crackling simmer. Regardless, it kept him warm; he didn’t want it put out, ever.

Those words, the ones George presented him with—they meant something, didn’t they? To him, they did. More than he could begin to express aloud.

“George?”

Too far for Dream’s liking, George made a short noise, followed by a drowsy, “Yeah?”

Soft, with irrefutable tenderness, he made sure that George knew: “I’m different with you, too.”

One late night, their friends trickled out of the call, and of course it ended up with them alone together. It was one of those times where they had turned on their webcams for no reason at all, everyone except Dream showing themselves, then left when they’d tired each other out. First it was Quackity, citing he had an assignment to do (which they gave him endless shit for, when he stated his reasoning), then Karl left to take a phone call and never came back, Callahan exited and stopped replying in the text chat without a single word, and finally, Sapnap complained about their sleep schedules being disastrous and promptly left without saying goodbye, likely to fall asleep on his own.

George looked so soft like this, knees up in his chair, arms wrapped around himself. He was wearing an indigo hoodie with a grey shirt peeking out under it, with a black beanie pulled over his head, entirely mismatched but so comfortable. He looked *warm*—Dream’s fingers twitched with need to reach through his screen and feel the skin of George’s cheek under his palm.

“Patches is awake again,” Dream mentioned, when she hopped off his bed and into his lap. “Hi, baby, hi,” he cooed, scratching at her little chin.

When he looked up to see what George was up to, he was simply leaning back in his chair, smiling. It felt like he was looking directly at him, right in his eyes, even though he couldn’t be seen.

Dream moved his own mic down, closer to her head, and wondered if she’d speak back tonight if he got George to talk to her. “George? Do you want to say hello?”

“Hi, Patches,” George said, softly. She looked up at the computer, and Dream wondered if she was observing him on the screen. “Did you have a nice sleep?”

She meowed, quiet and sweet, in turn. Dream did a quick inhale, then asked, excitably, “Did you hear that, George?”

It was clear he did, because he was sporting such a cute grin on his face when Dream looked closer. “I—yeah.” He nodded, and Dream watched as the happiness faded, melting off his face inch by inch. “I heard her.” He swallowed. “Hello, Patches. You’re very cute. I can’t wait to meet you.”

Hearing that hurt, because it implied that George still hadn’t met her, and it felt so unfair to him every time he was reminded of it. How George would act, he wondered, with her? Would he be doting or loving or playful? He liked to imagine they’d be fast friends.

“Dream?” George looked right at his screen, unflinching, even though he had no clear evidence his look was being returned. “Give her a kiss for me, yeah?”

Dream’s breath caught. “I will. Of course.” He over-exaggerated the smooching sounds as he peppered her tiny head with kisses, making sure George could hear every one of them through the mic. He remained pressed to her head, both of their cheeks together, hoping she felt all the love they had for her. “George loves you,” he told her in a whisper, not glancing away from George for a second, and her ear twitched and hit his nose in sign of hearing him. The mic must have picked up on it, because George responded with a sigh, burrowing himself further into his hoodie until Dream could only see his eyes, but there was no point in hiding. George was so expressive, eyes saying everything he wished to voice aloud, so easy to read if you knew him deep down. He might be hugging Patches, but Dream longed to hold George to his chest too, in moments like these.

You should be here, Dream thought, as he considered George’s micro expressions. Every inch of him ached with that belief; he trembled with how much he wanted it, how terrified he was of it.

She left his lap thereafter, as cats did, never tethered to one specific spot. Dream remained in call, tethered to a person across the ocean. He didn’t have the heart to move until George called mercy and gave into exhaustion.

Befriending someone on another continent came with a lot of difficulties, but Dream and George always found loopholes to make it work. Syncing sleep schedules in spite of time difference was

one of their first ingenious solutions; it only began a few years into their friendship, when they'd gotten to know each other so well that they no longer wanted to pull away, where they wanted to spend every waking moment together but couldn't. It was a fix, but it was not foolproof, and the past year had proven that. He and George, while self-admittedly a little codependent, went through phases like the moon. Days went by which would be full of each other, then slowly less and less until they were entirely out of sync, only seeing each other for a handful of hours.

He always missed George extra during those periods, unable to put himself to sleep to fix it despite how hard he tried. Each time they were out of it he didn't think much of it, though; it was normal for them, one could even suggest it to be healthy, although neither of them went out of their way to concern themselves with the consequences of what too much codependency would do to them. It was inevitable that they would end up in cycle together again; they always did, they gravitated toward each other in everything they did, even when it was unintentional. The cyclical process was tiring, them falling in and out of each other's patterns and back again.

It had been two weeks since their sleep schedules had last been the same, and Dream was losing it a bit. Everything he did throughout the day, he thought of George. He missed him every hour that trickled by, wondering when he'd be awake, if he'd message or call when he woke.

That evening, he checked Twitter offhandedly as Sapnap made himself a quick snack, scrolling with nothing better to do. And then he saw a tweet of George's from three hours ago. So, he was up.

"Is George awake?" he asked, a little loud, since Sapnap was nearby in the kitchen.

"Oh, yeah," Sapnap called back.

"You talked to him?"

The kitchen faucet turned on and off, before Sapnap walked into the living room, plopping himself on the couch as he continued to scarf down his waffles. With a full mouth of food, he told him, "He called me when he woke up, but he sounded weird. Said he was gonna watch movies today alone or somethin'." He shrugged. "Maybe he's feeling sick?"

That was... not *unlike* George, necessarily, but something he hadn't done alone in a while. In over a year, Dream might remark, in so long that he had completely forgotten George did stuff like that to cope. Because that was a habit George indulged in when he was sad, when he needed a serious distraction from life. He'd watch *Harry Potter* for hours on end, until his brain would shut up and he was no longer thinking about his own sadness.

He didn't think Sapnap knew about it, at least it didn't seem like he did. He and George were good at talking about deep-rooted matters, but the way Sapnap mentioned it so casually made Dream think he wasn't aware of this tradition.

"Okay," Dream said, easily. "I'm gonna—go finish something. We'll finish these episodes later?"

"How much later?" Sapnap asked, stuffing the final piece in his mouth. He had a smile on his face when he asked, "When you're off the phone with Gogy?"

Dream choked on his spit. "Who said I was gonna call him?"

Sapnap rolled his eyes at the audacious lie. "Just go."

"No, I have things to do," he protested, feeling an exposed combination between caught and offended. "Important shit."

“Yeah, whatever,” Sapnap snickered. “You’re so obvious, dude. Go talk and come back.”

nick said you’re up, Dream messaged on Discord, when he was back in his room. *wanna vc?*

It went unanswered for an hour, and he bided his time with emails and finalizing plans for a lore stream, trying not to think too much about it.

not in the mood, was the only message he got back, when George finally found the time to reply.

Dream was worried, so he pushed. *just a few mins?*

George called in response to the message, minutes later.

“Hi,” Dream said, once he’d picked up. Too fast for it to look like he hasn’t been waiting.

“Hullo,” George replied. Quick and to the point, he asked: “You wanted to talk?”

“Oh,” Dream began, not knowing he’d need a reason. They rarely needed to explain themselves to each other. “I was, uh, thinking. So I called.”

“You were thinking,” George repeated, “so you called.”

Dream made an affirmative noise. “Thinking of you.”

“Thinking of *me*,” George said, but the voice sounded so off, it didn’t sound like him at all. On any regular day, George would’ve taken that and ran with it, turned it into some kind of flirtatious joke. He chose not to.

“Yes, I was,” Dream affirmed, refusing to back down. “How’s your day?”

“Fine,” George said shortly, and that’s how Dream *really* knew something was wrong. He and George didn’t do short with each other; they talked to each other for ages, until one of them gave input, or stopped listening completely. It was one of the reasons they were such good friends. Neither of them knew how to shut up when alone together. Shortness bothered him. It bothered them both.

The *fine* lingered in call with tense silence, longer than either of them would’ve liked, before George must’ve realized how weird it had been to not add on. “Uh, and you?”

Very slowly, Dream replied, “My day’s been good.”

George asked, perhaps to try and alleviate some of the weirdness, “What did you do?”

“Me and Nick have been watching that new Marvel show,” Dream stated, on automatic, without having to think too hard.

“Nice,” George said, but it didn’t sound like he meant it. Under his breath, he said something that sounded an awful like, “You and Nick.”

“You... good?” Dream asked, feeling out of his element all of a sudden. He could always tell when something was off with George; it was one of his specialty superpowers.

“M fine,” George dismissed, but his voice sounded thick with something unsaid.

Their communication style had always been confusing. To others, it would not make much sense, but for them, it worked. Dream wouldn’t necessarily describe their means of expressing themselves

as *bad*, but a lot of the time George found it difficult to say things aloud. And a lot of the time Dream was too hot-headed, said things without thinking them through and ended up having to take it back and explain what he'd *really* meant. Most of the time, they understood this about each other—Dream could read George's moods easily, so he found it simple to navigate what he needed, and George never took words said in the heat of the moment to heart, at least not oftentimes.

Can you feel what he is feeling?, he'd been asked once, and he'd responded instantly, *sometimes*. Even despite the distance and George's need for privacy, he felt George in his blood, could tell when his energy was off and he was sad and internalizing negativity. He knew. He *knew*.

George was lying to him.

"You sure?" he asked softly, and it crackled over the phone.

George said nothing for a few seconds, and Dream almost expected him to give in, until he spoke up and said, "Yeah. I'm gonna go, though."

Well, that was that. "Stuff to do?" Dream prodded. He had nothing left.

"Yep," George lied, voice toneless. "See you."

And he hung up, without waiting for a reply.

It felt short, and like small talk, and unlike them. Nothing between them ever felt short; every time they spoke, if it didn't have to do with business, it was a huge ordeal. It was never like that. If one of them left too soon, the other complained later on. It was how they worked.

This time, it didn't feel like he could complain playfully about it later. It felt like there was something disavowing there, under the surface.

you sure you're alright? He tried one last time, an hour later.

George replied thirty minutes afterward: *just having a weird day*. It was more than he'd given before, and it didn't feel like a lie, but those words felt as if they held uneasiness inside them. Dream felt aggravated by the lack of response, but he couldn't even do anything to fix it. He didn't like this feeling of helplessness at all. George's emotions were on and off and on and off and Dream didn't fucking *understand* him sometimes. He didn't get him one bit.

Or, he did get him, but it felt frustrating no matter how much he tried understanding it.

He didn't know what to do—George was not going to offer more today, and there was no point in worrying if he didn't want to let Dream in—so he went to nap, and avoided it.

"I was thinking," Dream began over the phone a few nights later, "about when you come to Florida. I'm making a list of things we should do."

George laughed, softly, and Dream could picture the crinkles by his eyes as he smiled. "A list?"

"Mhm." He pulled up his notes app on his phone. "Is there anything you want on it?"

"Read it to me, then," George said to him. "I'll let you know if anything is missing."

And so Dream read it to him, went through all of his ideas. Universal Studios, a handful of restaurants, his favourite beaches, his family cottage, the list went on, seemingly forever. Then, it tapered off into small things, things he'd wanted to do with George since they first met online years ago—chess in real life, baking their favourite desserts, decorating the house for Christmas together. Everything he'd ever wished for.

And as Dream kept reading, George got quieter. His ad libs slowed, until he wasn't adding much else to the conversation. It was a lot to take in, so Dream didn't fault him; he had so many *plans*, with everything. It was a lot to handle, even emotionally.

"Anything?" Dream prompted, when he'd finished.

"Hm?" George said, very tiny, but he didn't add much further.

"Were you even listening?" Dream asked, kind of hurt. Normally George not listening to him was more of an annoyance than particularly hurtful, but this felt important to talk through together, it was important for him to share with George everything he wanted for them.

"No, I have been," George soothed. It put Dream at ease; George wouldn't lie to him about this. "I promise, I just... no, I don't have much to add. You have everything."

"Oh." Dream smiled, picking at his sweatpants and thinking about it again. "Aren't you excited?"

George hummed, wistful. "Of course."

"We've been talking about this for so long," Dream continued, sighing. If he wished hard enough, maybe George would appear in his dream tonight. Quieter, he added, "I've been wanting this for so long."

George didn't reply to that, and the sentence fell flat between them.

"George?" Dream asked, when nothing was said.

George sighed, but this time he sounded frustrated, out of nowhere. It gave Dream whiplash. "Doesn't seem like you want it enough."

"Are you kidding?" Dream asked, shocked. It sounded so bitter that Dream didn't know how to react; he'd asked if he was joking, but it didn't sound like a bit. "Don't even joke about that."

"I'm not," George replied. He sounded so serious, it made Dream uncomfortable. George wouldn't be joking about this, would he? Not like this. It felt like such an odd thing to joke about, especially between them.

"George." His confusion mounted, thinking back to the past few weeks. He thought George understood, that he could tell how badly Dream wanted it too. "C'mon. You know I want you here." *You must know how bad I want this.*

"Do I, now?" George questioned, and he sounded so hurt, Dream didn't know how to act. "You sure you want it, Dream? It's been years, and we still haven't met."

Dream held his breath. This didn't feel like George picking a fight because he was bored, this felt like something real. "I—wait, what do you—"

"It's been *years*," George repeated, and his voice sounded strangled, like he didn't even want to say the words himself. "Years, Dream, and we've been best friends for so much of that."

Best friends, echoed Dream's mind. Gently, he tried, "You *are* my best friend. I want to see you."

George laughed, but Dream hated the sound of it at that moment. It sounded so disbelieving, it made him nauseous. "Are you trying to convince me, or yourself?"

"Shut *up*," Dream snapped, strong and immediate. It was rude, but he didn't give a shit. "You can't *tell me* what I want."

"Maybe not," George allowed, but he didn't sound like he felt bad when he continued, "but how am I supposed to believe you want it?"

"The fact that we're best friends?" Dream began, trying to calm himself from veering into lividness. "The fact that I *love* you? That we've been trying to get you here for months? That I've wanted you with me for years? That I fucking—go crazy having you this far from me, that I miss you all the time, that I dream about being around you, that I've been waiting for you for *so*—"

"You've been waiting?" George exploded, repeating his words, like he'd heard nothing else Dream had just said. "*You've* been waiting? What about *me*?"

"We've *both* been waiting," Dream corrected, desperately, "that's the point, that's the fucking *point* I'm trying to make, George—"

"Maybe you shouldn't have waited," George cut him off, and Dream didn't even understand what he could've intended by that.

"What the fuck does that mean?" Dream lamented, at a loss. "We were *forced* to wait, because of this fucking virus."

George took a deep breath, and stopped, and Dream just knew he was about to say something that he wouldn't get out of his head for a long time. "*You* could've visited *me*, though."

Oh, Dream thought, and his heart physically sunk. *That's what this is about.*

"George," he started, unsure, shutting his eyes. He had so much he wanted to say to that—he didn't even know where to begin with it.

It was different before, Dream wanted to say, but he felt sick and couldn't even voice it. *And it's even more different now, for other reasons.*

It felt so unfair for George to say that, at least he felt it to be—but then again, it didn't feel fair to George, either. This entire situation felt unfair to them both. He couldn't even blame George for saying it. He wondered if George truly held resentment inside of him toward Dream for this. It hurt, thinking he might.

He rubbed his eyes, tiredly. This felt like a fight they were having less because either of them were upset, and more because they were both tired of waiting. They were just both so fucking tired, he realized. It hurt, carrying this inside of themselves for so long, all the longing and yearning and waiting. It was painful harbouring it. Of course they were unravelling at the seams, falling apart. Of course this was where it had all taken them.

"George, I..." *I'm scared*, he wished to say, but the lump in his throat did not allow it to pass by. *You terrify me, how much I care about you terrifies me, and it isn't just you, it's everything, it's the world that scares me, and everything could fall apart, and you mean so much, and I could destroy it.*

He thought, *everything in my head is a mess*. He didn't know how long he could continue repressing it.

Neither of them said a word for a good few minutes. Every second that passed felt crushing.

"George," he started again, for the third time, hoping the right words would come. He wanted to fix this.

But George did what he did best: reverted back to his roots, and pushed Dream away. "I need to sleep. It's late." It was two in the morning for George, he never slept at this time anymore. *You're lying*, Dream wanted to say, but he kept it in; it would do them no good. "I'm going."

Dream held his breath. George was still in the call. Did he want Dream to beg for him to stay? Did he want him to fight him, properly, for them to say things that didn't matter because in the long run, none of this mattered, they'd be together eventually, they'd be together *soon*, but he knew it was hurting them both, waiting, wallowing, wanting.

You can't just run whenever it gets hard, Dream said internally, blinking back the cloudiness from his eyes, *you can't just push me aside, you can't just—*

He didn't get a chance to finish the thought completely, he didn't even get a chance to breathe. George had left. He'd vanished. As if he'd never been there to begin with, but he had been—and the only proof was the sting of tears and the deep-setting ache within Dream's chest.

and there's no rest

Chapter Summary

Dream was a master at repression.

Dream liked himself well enough. Then again, it might be better to articulate it as: he had grown to like himself over the years, after he'd evolved and learnt from past mistakes. This wasn't to imply he was a perfect person by any means, or that he wouldn't make similar mistakes again—only that he had the self-awareness to recognize his strengths and flaws. He could be self-critical and self-confident in one breath. He had qualities that he was proud to have, like his innovativeness, generosity, and intuitive intelligence, but there were pieces which he didn't like, and never would. Pieces of himself which he hated and hid from the world. Pieces which he tried to hide from even himself.

Peeling back the layers, it was evident that Dream was a master at repression.

His coping mechanisms left much to be desired. Repressing wasn't healthy, and it often returned to bite him in the ass. Despite his *repressive* abilities, Dream was too much of an *expressive* person to let it go on forever. He almost always cracked no matter how hard he tried to keep everything in, broke down and split open for everyone's entertainment and viewing pleasure.

The worst was that the majority of the time, people had already been able to see the parts he was too scared to show, to admit to, to feel with the acceptance they deserved. They'd seen everything, despite his best efforts to disguise it.

When his speedrunning scandal came to a close, he'd seen many people say some variation of the following words: *this makes a lot of sense, but also no sense at all. So, he just pretended things were fine for months?*

Yes, he'd respond, without saying it outright. He had pretended he was okay. Nothing was okay, but that was how he fucking coped, alright, did people get it now? Now and then, he just couldn't allow himself to feel how he really felt. It hurt too much to let himself feel the awful shit. He couldn't harvest it, let it ruin him, let his mind run on its own without moderation.

A big part of him also felt—fuck, he'd deserved it, all the critique, didn't he? He deserved the hate. He *did*.

He let people have their fun, he spoke his mind when he felt it to be important, and he avoided it beyond that. There was no point in doing anything more.

This was how he handled difficult things. He'd be a therapist's wet dream.

Avoidance was essential for him to endure pain, and he was exceptional at it.

Fighting with friends was the same—he forgave with a quickness that others did not find easy, when it was someone he loved and didn't want to cut from his life. Every damn time. It was rare that Dream argued with a loved one and let it fester for long. It felt like such a waste, all that negativity.

It also just felt plain depressing.

So, he fixed things. He was good at that.

He reached out to George first, the day after their fight. All he did was send—with no mention of the fight whatsoever—an unreleased clip from his next YouTube video, asking if he felt the editing was too choppy.

George, bless his soul, replied: *nah, seems good*. Proceeded, after, to send him a paragraph asking about the mechanics of a plug-in he was working on. They had a short, productive conversation about it, and that was that.

It wasn't their normal, but it was something. It was manageable. It indicated that despite whatever they'd fought about, they weren't beyond repair. It meant they'd be alright.

That was what mattered to him, at the crux of it.

The reality was this: they were both experienced avoiders. Worse than the avoidance tactics, they were much too codependent to truly ignore each other, anyway. The interdependence in their friendship left limited space for actual fighting, at least not fighting for extended periods of time. Ignoring each other was pointless; entire careers were seamlessly intertwined within friendship, too.

They were best friends, and they were partners.

They did not ignore each other, not actively, and especially not with malicious intent—but they did ignore arguments, and uncomfortable moments, and sometimes even feelings.

They did not ignore each other.

It was an unspoken rule, and this time was no exception.

Rules aside, that didn't mean Dream didn't feel hurt, that he didn't spiral over what happened. Reflecting on their conversation during low points when he was alone and left with no one but the company of his own dwelling. His brain was his greatest foe, and moments like these proved it best.

He couldn't help but feel that there were some difficult, painful truths to what George had said.

“Do you want it enough?”

Dream did, was the thing. He wanted it. He felt it in each crevice of his body. There was nothing that he wanted more than George, there, with him. Not a single thing in the universe. He dreamed of it, he yearned for it, he longed for it.

“It's been years.”

Yet, at the same time, nothing terrified him more than the idea of George there, in front of him. Looking at him with those eyes, in the reaching distance of being touched. Fucking hell, it made him shiver thinking about it.

He wanted George with him so badly that he almost didn't, scared of fucking it up if he finally had

it. Was feeling like this even possible? It was the honest truth, if he was asked how he really felt about it, pretty reassuring words aside.

Would George get it, though? Would George understand the mess that was his mind?

Would George find it within himself to forgive him, if he knew how Dream felt?

It scared him so much, the possibility of more. And he and George were already so much, so how could they be even more? They felt so much—so much slipped through the cracks between them, unspoken. So much wasn't out there. He could hear it when George spoke to him. Dream could feel it in his heart when he spoke back.

God, George didn't even know how he looked, and yet—he was his best friend, in spite of all that. He talked to him like *that*. Fuck.

“With you, it's different. I'm different.”

It felt like a bruise, when George told him things like that, one that he felt the temptation to press down on because he liked the ache of it, but that he knew would hurt if he pushed too hard. He felt it everywhere. He felt it in his fingertips, in his bones, in his *bone marrow*.

He didn't know why it meant so much—or, he did. But. But talking about it. It was. God.

It was just. Too much.

He was going to throw up again. His anxiety was through the roof. He couldn't eat. He couldn't sleep for longer than three hours at a time. He might be losing it.

It hurt to admit he might've hurt George. Could he live with himself, knowing that?

Everything just really fucking hurt.

Wallowing occupied a lot of time, especially if one did so for as long as Dream. He was having a real pity party. But he'd come to a conclusion: if Dream could talk to George about this, without filter or fear of being too much, and the preemptive knowledge that George would understand, this is what he would say. He would tell him three stories, and hope it explained everything.

One: he would recall, with as much detail as possible, the first time George had sent him a selfie.

They were younger then: Dream, freshly eighteen and moved out of his parent's home, and George, a twenty-something Computer Science major who was beyond gifted at coding and screamed like no one he'd ever heard before. They had only recently begun speaking to one another in private; he'd interacted with him a lot in group settings, especially working on web development projects together, but sometimes they'd be left alone to finish things and would spend more time talking than doing anything productive.

George was so fucking *fun*, was the thing. Dream didn't expect that. On the surface, George came across as kind and easy-going, but the more Dream spoke to him, the more that he learned, and

what he enjoyed the most was how lively George could be when he stopped thinking about how he was coming across to others, or when he trusted people enough to be his true self. His true self was... unexpected. So, so fun—entertaining, hilarious, and dry-witted. A true delight.

What Dream didn't expect the most was when he checked his Snapchat one day, and instead of a picture of an old laptop or homework or a morning coffee, he'd received a selfie of George. In it, he was pouting, all lips and wide brown eyes and an irritatingly perfect nose and short brown hair. His dorm's door was off its hinges in the background of the photo, with a caption attached reading, *my roommate broke it :(*. The purpose of the photo was obviously the broken door, but Dream only spared it a glance. How was George so casual about looking like that? He was, well...

Is this you? Dream had asked in chat, as soon as the photo had timed out.

It is indeed me, George had replied, not seeming nervous at all to have shown himself. His Snapchat icon, which Dream now realized did not do him justice in the slightest, popped up at the bottom to lurk as Dream read.

He's attractive, Dream had thought to himself, as soon as it was confirmed. *Good looking*. He had swallowed hard, thinking of the picture. He'd thought such things about a handful of men in the past, mindlessly, but this was the first real friend he'd met with that being his initial thought, the second he saw them. And, well, c'mon, he was able to admit when a man was pretty, couldn't he—he might not be *gay*, but he had eyes, alright. He didn't care what people said; it was fine to think that sort of thing about the same gender. It didn't have to mean anything more. It *didn't* mean anything more.

He couldn't tell his new friend he thought he was hot, though; that would've been real fucking weird. They had only just started talking more, one-on-one. Dream couldn't scare him away by unintentionally hitting on him. So, he just replied, *haha you kinda look like that one guy, shawn mendes*.

George replied instantly, indignant, *LOL wtf?? I do not*. And nothing more.

Months passed after that, with countless more George selfies, some which Dream collected by screenshotting for no purpose whatsoever other than his self-proclaimed excuse of 'blackmail'. There were zero Dream selfies sent in return, at least not full-faced ones, or ones that did not come from his childhood photo-books. It almost felt like George continued to share this part of himself because he was curious about that part of Dream, too, but Dream wasn't inclined to share more. He left it alone. Never reciprocated. Enough time went by, eventually, for it to turn into a thing. And then it became more than a thing—it became his whole career, by pure accident. He'd never intended for this to be his life, but suddenly it was.

Dream thought about that moment a lot. He wasn't sure why.

Two: he'd tell George about the months after his last breakup, at the beginning of 2020, about the parts he hadn't shared with him. How Dream had promised George he'd fly him out to America, when COVID hadn't seemed like a real threat, but that he'd chosen to write it off because he was in the middle of a life-changing house move, and his ex had hurt him beyond belief.

He'd backspaced on multiple texts to George that said complicated, confusing things, most of them jokes tinged with some level of truth, all along the lines of, *I wish she understood me like you haha*

and you're more fun than her, we should date instead ;) and what if we kissed when we meet next month, wouldn't that be funny? the fans would love that shit.

It was all garbage, in retrospect, and he thanks himself every day for not pressing send on any of the messages, and for not flying George out then. It wouldn't have been fair to either of them, especially not George, and Dream would've been a *mess*. He wouldn't have trusted himself to make good decisions whilst George was nearby, in front of him, *there*, and he was dealing with whatever the fuck that all was.

Dream wasn't even sure if he was into men—as he grew older, he stopped feeling adverse to the concept and landed on feeling: *well, it's not that I would never date a guy, it's just really unlikely to happen*. Sometimes he caught himself thinking that, and he forced himself to pause and ask—is this... normal? To feel this way at all? To feel this way about your best friend? To prefer spending time with them to the point where the boundaries of intimacy blurred so much that he needed to ask himself if the next thing he did could change them for good?

George did not deserve to deal with the mayhem that was Dream's mind, not at all, not after he'd been such a wonderful friend through the years. Dream made his excuses, and now, he could recognize it as the best decision he could've possibly made those months ago.

Three: he'd tell him that, while Dream had thought it to be utterly ridiculous when George had proposed the idea as a joke, he *would* marry him to get him to America. He would. He'd do it, and he had thought about this with the most serious contemplation possible, because Dream liked to approach all questions directed at him with measure. And while George might be outrageous for suggesting it, wasn't Dream crazier for deciding: *honestly, yes, if it really came down to it, I would marry you*.

Dream told himself it wasn't a big deal, but then he would remind himself of how much time and paperwork and alarming legality went into the institution of marriage. Even *more* insane than before, after considering all those details, Dream still went: *yeah, seems like a lot of work, but I'd still do it*.

Did George realize how bizarre that was? Did he *see* it? Did he understand how ludicrous it was that Dream would actually do that for him, that he'd accept that? For George it might've been a funny thought, but Dream had taken that joke and approached it with real, careful consideration. He had decided that he would probably marry George, if he had to. He had said *yes*—not to George, but to himself. Or, he did tell George, but George still thought it was some joke. Afterward, it became an on-going gag between them, and it haunted him.

All of that wasn't normal, even for them. It wasn't.

He loved George too much, didn't he?

That frightened him.

When it came down to it, Dream could tell him those three stories. Or he could tell him something simpler, much more concise and laid out. It was one pretty little sentence: *I love you*. And he

wasn't—he wasn't *in love* with George, okay, he was not. Dream knew how he felt. He *loved* him—he loved those that he cared for with his entire heart, but George especially, because George had become one of his favourite people in the entire universe and he'd do anything for him. He'd probably kill for him, if he really had to. He loved him so much.

No one would understand, though. No one understood how Dream's brain worked, except for him. It was so... confusing, wasn't it? The love he felt for George. It wasn't romance, it wasn't being 'in love', it wasn't like that, despite what people said or joked about or thought they knew. It *wasn't*. He just really loved him, a lot. Too much, if it was possible.

It was so complicated, the way he felt.

He packaged how he felt in the corners of these stories, hidden in plain sight, and wondered if George would understand what he meant.

Dream thought that he would understand, if he had the guts to tell him.

That was why he said nothing, and he kept it within. George understanding would be ten times more horrifying than him not understanding at all.

"Dream, buddy," Sapnap said, standing over where Dream had curled into himself on the couch, "this is depressing."

"Thanks," Dream said shortly, because that kind of commentary, while obvious, was not helpful.

Sapnap groaned, then sat next to him. It was better than what he was doing before, staring at him with sad eyes like some creepy overlord. He reached out to pet Patches's back, and in a kinder tone, said, "Patches hasn't left your side in days. Kinda miss the little gremlin."

"Don't call her a gremlin," Dream pouted, protecting her ears in jest. *She can tell I'm sad*, Dream didn't say.

All Sapnap did was shake his head, then said out of nowhere: "Is this fight about something dumb?"

Dream went still, all over. Didn't move an inch. "Who said there's a fight?"

"George did," Sapnap relayed, which took Dream by surprise. He didn't think George would clue Sapnap in on what was going on, but—well, at least one of them had the sense to. It should've been Dream; he *lived* with Sapnap, after all, but he had been so busy wallowing. "He didn't give details, y'know how he gets. But, bro, even if he didn't say anything, the fucking shouting I heard two nights ago would've done it."

Dream tensed, then shut his eyes. "Jesus. I'm sorry. We were kind of loud."

"You're *always* loud," Sapnap pointed out, but when Dream looked at him, he didn't seem bothered by this.

They both went silent for a good minute, the only sound between them being Patches purring loudly, happy Sapnap was around once again.

“I thought you couldn’t hear me from your room?” Dream muttered, not looking at him directly.

“I wasn’t in my room,” Sapnap told him, quietly. “I was getting water. Couldn’t hear much, just stuff here and there.”

Dream swallowed. *Stuff* was such a vague way to put it. He opened his mouth to say that, but instead what came out was the synopsis of the entire fight, which boiled down to, “George thinks I don’t want to meet him.”

All he got in response to that was a loud snort from Sapnap.

Dream looked at him, sharply. He was too on edge for it to be some kind of joke. “Is this funny to you?”

“I’m sorry,” Sapnap backed down, holding his hands up in defence, but he was smiling as he did it. “Is George... blind? Is he *stupid*? I didn’t think he was stupid, but that is the dumbest shit I’ve ever heard.”

Dream relaxed. Well, that wasn’t what he was expecting.

“Like, you and I *live together*,” Sapnap continued, off on his own rant, “and I don’t see you some days, just because you’re spending time with George.”

This was beginning to sound a bit like a call-out. Dream wasn’t sure how to react.

Sapnap went on, “And don’t get me started about when I *am* there, and I get fuckin’ ignored because y’all are—”

“I get it,” Dream cut in, louder, flustered and flushing. “We spend a lot of time together, I know.”

“I mean, we all do.” Sapnap shrugged, easily. “But you guys are hella attached.”

“Alright, Sap, *enough*,” Dream said, embarrassed.

Sapnap laughed, then shook his head disbelievingly. “So, that’s the entire fight?”

“I guess,” Dream said, uncomfortable now that he had to explain it more. “I mean, that’s not... all. He said some other stuff, too. It just made me feel terrible. I feel like I—I—ugh, I don’t know. Like, I *hurt* him. But I didn’t mean to.”

Sapnap was nodding along, listening carefully. He was a good listener when Dream needed him to be.

“And he brought up how I could’ve gone to London,” Dream revealed, lump in his throat. “And how... it seemed as if, maybe, to him, I was avoiding meeting. Like I’ve been avoiding it for a while.”

“Ah,” Sapnap said, and when Dream looked at him, he had a sudden look of understanding on his face. “And you feel like shit, now.”

Dream snorted. That was a concise summary, if he’d ever heard one. “Yeah. Pretty much.”

Sapnap sighed, and opened his arms and motioned with his hands, “C’mere.”

Dream eyed him, playfully wary, then wrinkled his nose. “For a cuddle?”

Sapnap rolled his eyes, exasperated. “Dude.”

Dream burst into a fond laugh, and gave in. “Okay, fine.” He patted Patches, until she got off and retreated to wherever she wished to go, and then slumped over Sapnap until they were in some weird, cradling, pretzel-y cuddle. They couldn’t really cuddle as normal in this position on the couch, as it was Sapnap holding *him*, and Dream was so much taller, but they made do. Sapnap’s hand went to his hair immediately, and Dream sighed happily. He really did feel a little better, letting him in. Maybe he should stop isolating when he was upset and talk through it instead.

“Feel better?” Sapnap said, now that he was closer. He squeezed Dream’s shoulder, and he burrowed deeper.

“A lot,” Dream admitted, soft. “Thanks, Nick.”

“Course,” Sapnap said, easily. “You know I got you.”

Sometimes Dream forgot that this was the point of living with friends, with his best friend. They were there to lean on, in physical presence, when he needed someone. Carrying the world on his shoulders by himself didn’t need to be a common occurrence. He didn’t have to bear his spirals all alone. He had needed this reminder, and he was grateful he had Sapnap there to help.

“Love you,” Dream mumbled, because he needed it said once.

“You’re ridiculous,” Sapnap told him, very fond, but he cradled him closer, passed a hand over Dream’s forehead. “I love you too, dumbass.”

They went silent for some time, but Sapnap didn’t move an inch. It was comfortable, laying like this, but the quiet meant that Dream’s mind wandered once again, and it inevitably landed back on George.

“I miss him,” Dream shared, into Sapnap’s shoulder, voice wobbling as he revealed it.

He couldn’t see Sapnap when he spoke; he didn’t want to look at him, in fear he might do something questionable like cry, but Sapnap just said, “Then talk to him, idiot.” There was movement, and Dream could imagine he was shaking his head. “You’re both too damn stubborn.”

Dream swallowed against his dry mouth. “We’re kind of talking.”

“But you’re not *talking*,” Sapnap said, because he knew them. He’d experienced their patterns before.

“I don’t want George to think I don’t want him here,” Dream said, voice cracking. “Especially when—you know how much I do.”

“Then *tell him that*,” he replied, gently. “Make sure he knows. Get it through his thick skull.” Sapnap tapped his knuckles against Dream’s head, lightly, to get his point across.

Dream huffed a laugh, looking at Sapnap again. “I don’t think he’ll understand for real until he’s actually in front of me.”

“You guys are so weird,” was all Sapnap said, in defeat. “I swear, you are the weirdest friends ever. And I’ve been friends with a lot of weirdos.”

“Fuck off,” Dream scoffed, with amusement. “We’re just… I dunno.” He shrugged, as if that might help clarify it further, but it did nothing to explain the complex relationship they had.

“I dunno,” Sapnap repeated, even more confused now. “Fuck, if you don’t know, then who does?”

Dream held his breath, unsure.

That was the question, wasn’t it?

Hours later, George messaged on Discord, one word: *Dream*.

He bit his lip when he saw it. *George*, he replied, chewing so hard that he could taste the copper tones in his blood.

George was online, so he took no time to reply with a simple: *talk to me you dick*.

Dream read it a few times to make sure it really said that, then smiled with absolute relief. He didn’t know how everything between them could flit between being so complicated and so simple, but he was grateful for it in these moments.

aren’t we talking right now? Dream replied, lighthearted, because he was sure George was alright if he was calling him a dick.

not really, George sent first, sounding so serious it worried him, but then: *i might miss you*.

Dream stared at the words. God, he could feel it in his teeth. George made him feel so much. *I might miss you too*, he said back, even though what he actually wanted to say was something more along the lines of, ‘I missed you so fucking much I thought I was dying’, but George would’ve called him overdramatic and clingy for that.

okay, George replied. Okay? What did ‘okay’ mean, what was that supposed to—and then, with an enviable amount of nonchalance, he got a message saying: *did my visa interview today btw*.

Dream called, because what the fuck?

“What?” Dream exclaimed, the moment the call connected. He could hear George giggling, loud and happy, in the background, and his heart practically *sang* when he heard that sound.

Between giggles, George managed, “I said—that I—”

“No, I saw what you said,” Dream replied, laughing at this absurd situation. “You really buried the lede there, dude.”

“You buried the lede, dude,” George repeated, in an American accent. “Ugh, am I gonna start talking like that when I move there?”

“Who cares about that,” he dismissed, because that wasn’t important at all right now. “I want to know how it *went*.”

“Dream,” was all George said. Dream could hear the smile in his voice over the line, and his heart thumped faster.

“Oh, my God,” Dream breathed. “That good?”

Around a very obvious grin, George said, “I’m definitely getting it.”

“*Fuck*,” Dream exclaimed. “Yeah?”

“I’d say another month or so,” George reasoned, but he sounded so goddamn elated saying this. “Then, I’ll be there.”

“Holy shit. I’m so...” Dream swallowed, unsure if they should talk about it, then carried on, “I’m just so glad you still want to come.”

“*Dream*,” George replied, aghast, “of course I do, are you stupid?”

Dream went quiet, then said, “Can you blame me for worrying?”

George didn’t reply.

“Sorry for bringing it up,” he mumbled. “I know this is a good moment. I’m ruining it.”

“Shut up for a second,” George said, easily. He didn’t mean anything hurtful by it—in fact, it made Dream feel more relaxed that this was how George was responding, because it was how he talked when he was fine. “Are you listening to me?”

Dream went still, knowing they were about to talk about it. “I am.”

“Hear me out,” George told him, and his tone went kinder. “I needed to say it one time. I needed to just... let it out. I’m not... I’m not *mad* at you, alright?”

“That’s complete bullshit,” Dream managed, when he found his words. “You must be angry. You sounded so...”

“I’m not,” George replied. It was so honest that Dream couldn’t help but believe him. “Not anymore.”

At a loss, he wondered, “How?”

“I can’t stay mad at you,” George said, as if it was obvious. “Not about this.”

There’s no way, Dream thought. *It can’t be this easy.*

“Dream,” George began. Dream didn’t like that he sounded like he was about to laugh. “I can hear you thinking.”

“Can I... at least explain myself?” Dream tried, even though he hadn’t prepared an explanation of any kind.

“Are you not hearing me?” George asked. “It doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Are you—are you *sure*?” Dream asked.

George made an affirming noise. “If it becomes an issue again, I’ll bring it up.”

“You didn’t bring it up before,” Dream pointed out, feeling sad. “You... avoided it, for ages. That’s what all that weird stuff from before was about, right?”

“Yes,” George admitted, like he didn’t want to confirm it. “None of that matters anymore, though.”

“How does it not *matter*?” Dream asked. It mattered to him, because: “I hurt you.”

“You didn’t mean to,” George reasoned, with the sweetest voice Dream had ever heard from him. “And I hurt you, too.”

His heart squeezed. “You didn’t mean to, either.”

“Exactly,” George said, bright again, like these words solved it all. “Problem solved. Boom. Nothing matters, this fight was stupid, and I’m gonna be there within weeks.”

Dream inhaled, sharply. “Fuck. *Weeks.*”

George sighed. “Listen. I know you’re gonna be thinking about it forever, because you’re you, so I’m gonna explain this once so we can move on.”

Dream stayed quiet, made a humming noise so George knew he was listening.

“I know I was an arse about it,” George said. “I was just starting to get proper fucking miserable, being stuck in this apartment. I sat here thinking about it for days. And then, I dunno. We fought, and the interview came, and I knew it would make me feel better. So, I did it, and during it, they asked me some questions.” His voice went quieter. “I had to talk about you, because of the channel. Also, it’s your house and all. And the person handling my application said I’d know my answer within weeks, a bit over a month at most. And I remembered how long we’ve been in the middle of this process—years, I guess, but officially months with the visa, yeah? And... you’ve helped with so much of it. You *did* so much of it, for me. Did research, answered questions, and helped gather documents. And—”

George stopped, as if he needed a moment, as if he was getting choked up from talking about it. Dream wouldn’t admit it out loud, but he had tears in his eyes.

“And, Dream, you’re so dumb for ever thinking I’d not want to come, over this. You mean—” He stopped short again, suddenly, like he was on the verge of revealing too much. “You are—”

Head spinning, Dream wondered, “I mean... I am...”

“God,” George uttered, “you are just so *stupid.*”

Dream, knowing George was finished, said with feeling: “I love you.”

George’s responding laugh was so warm. “I say you’re stupid, and you say that.”

“Uh huh,” Dream murmured, because George might’ve ended with that, but he’d said so much more between the words of his ramble, and Dream understood every piece of it. This was them at their essence. “I can’t wait until you’re here.”

“I’m happy,” George told him, and Dream could hear it in how he said it. It made *him* happy. “We’ll be together soon. Okay?”

It was scary, knowing he would be. But Dream was beginning to understand—despite how terrifying the prospect was, he no longer wanted to let that fear take hold of him. And that made it easier to reply to George, with a lightness he didn’t previously possess—“Okay.”

In the aftermath of fights within friendships, there were inescapable periods of *wow we hurt each*

other but we survived it and now we're even closer than before, can you believe it? A fight could sometimes act as a reminder of that. He welcomed it, this time.

Everything in his friendship with George came in cycles, patterns, ebbs and flows. It was especially relevant after they had arguments—oftentimes, what it took for them to get to a really pleasant period, was a downright awful conflict. They fought over trivial things regularly, their stubbornness and needs to be ‘correct’ aggravating one another, but there was a rare moment, on occasion, where realness slipped into a fight.

Dream did like making up with him, though.

Once the worst of it was over, it led into a new period. This time, they were codependent to an inexplicable degree. The clinginess was welcomed amongst each other, encouraged even. They slept on call every night until they grew sick of it. They shared screens for everything, between editing and random apps and TV shows. They were rarely apart.

“I had a dream ‘bout you, the other day,” Dream told George over the phone, days later.

“Really?” George said, with a coy lilt. “Still on your mind, even in your dreams?”

“Always, George,” Dream whispered, and it wasn’t pretend; it was fact. He wondered if George could hear that in how he said it.

“And what happened in this dream, *Dream*?” George said, wondrous.

“Well, we met,” Dream lied, making it up as he spoke, because the reality was that he couldn’t remember a single second, “and then you passed out, because you couldn’t believe how hot I was ___”

George laughed, loud, catching on. “You’re full of it.”

“—and then I had to give you mouth-to-mouth to save you, like the *hero* I am—”

George shrieked. “Oh, my *God*, Dream, you’re so—”

It continued, on and on.

A few evenings later, he sat there listening to George chewing loudly over call. It would’ve been a pet peeve, but some things that usually were irritating to Dream weren’t as frustrating when it was George doing them. It was—dare he say it—almost endearing, hearing George talk with a full mouth.

Still, he commented, absentminded, “Swallow before you speak, George.”

George giggled, muffled by the food in his mouth, then said in a teasing voice, “Oh, I’ll swallow, alright.”

Dream looked at his monitor in shock, and choked out, “*Excuse me?*”

“What?” George replied, with innocence, but Dream knew that man too well to believe it.

“I—you—you’re gross,” was all Dream could manage, appalled.

It did not let up, even in group environments.

During one of George's streams, in front of their friends and one hundred thousand viewers, Dream

texted him on iMessage, *you look real cute in that sweater*.

Dream watched the stream carefully. He could recognize the exact moment George read it, because he hid a smile, feigned annoyance, and shook his head with dismissal. "Oh, my God," was all George said aloud.

The others in call were confused. "What is it?" Quackity asked.

"Nothing," George said, with a very obvious blush on his cheekbones.

"C'mon, George," Dream teased, smiling at his reaction. "Read it for the class."

George, still pink, replied: "Shut *up*, Dream."

Bad sighed. "Of course it's something to do with Dream."

"Yeah," Quackity said, knowingly, "it's probably a text saying some shit like, you look so sexy today, blah blah blah."

Dream went red, glad no one could see him. Was he that predictable? Ouch.

George, in response, laughed so hard it couldn't be denied.

Later, when they were alone, Dream told him, "I meant it, y'know."

"Meant what?" George asked, but Dream could tell he could understand without needing context.

Still, Dream repeated it because he wanted George flustered again. "Today, on stream. You looked hot."

George made an affronted sound. "You said I looked *cute*."

"You did," Dream confirmed—grinning, giddy, and absolutely *gone*. "And hot, too."

"What is *wrong* with you?" George said, abashed. He couldn't take compliments at all, which was why Dream loved to give them to him.

"I can't help it," Dream murmured, in defence, hands over his eyes as he tried to imagine George smiling down at him. Everything he was saying, he felt; it was a little bit of a joke on the surface, but if one was to scrape away at all the bullshit, they'd find nothing but truth beneath. His next sentence came out too honest. "I really can't, not when you're that pretty."

"*Stop*," George whined, and Dream could practically picture him covering his face with embarrassment. "Now I'm pretty, as well?"

"You're everything," Dream replied, strangely tender.

Breath hitched over the phone line. Much too gently, George echoed: "I'm everything?"

"Mhm," Dream confirmed, with sudden inexplicable shyness. Wasn't it too big of a compliment? To be everything, to someone.

They were silent for a while, as they took it in. Dream closed his eyes, and felt his words sitting on his chest, much too weighty for it to mean nothing.

"Dream."

“Mhm?”

George inhaled. “You’re...”

Dream began to smile. He enjoyed these moments so much. “Yes?”

“You,” George told him, with the utmost seriousness, “are a lot.”

Whispering, Dream asked, “A lot?”

“Yes,” he said, hushed beyond measure, and Dream liked to think he knew what George meant. “It’s... incredible.”

Dream breathed out, shaky. There was so much hidden in these vague compliments.

“It’s incredible?” Dream repeated, voice thin and strained.

“Yeah,” George breathed, “you are.” *You’re incredible*, George was saying, in his haphazard way.

Dream wished he could see him now, more than anything, because he thought if he could look in George’s eyes at this moment, he might disintegrate on the spot. And he wanted to; he wanted George to kill him dead.

George’s words got to him, in ways Dream couldn’t explain. It would be weird to tell him how he felt about them. It—it meant so *much*, and it made him feel—*fuck*. “George,” he tried, but it sounded strangled. He should probably stop talking, before something too much came out.

George, knowing this, murmured, “Mm, be quiet, now.”

After releasing two heavy breaths, Dream went, “okay.”

Quiet overcame them, the words on both of their minds, until slumber took over.

Pushing past it, they went on like this for days. Weeks. A full month passed, and tension bled in everywhere. It fell through the cracks of their silences and the stutters and the moments of things getting too *real*. Things between him and George were good, they were *so* good, beyond good, better than they’d ever been before.

George’s visa was approved, and they opened the letter together. Dream and Sapnap both lost their voices screaming, that day. And George *shed tears* over it—not many, but tears of relief were present, and Dream held the moment in his heart like a precious gift.

After confirmation, they figured things out incredibly fast. Figured out where George’s furniture would go, decided he’d leave his set-up at his parent’s house, and he’d finished the majority of his packing, working at it with an immense, rare determination.

Everything was falling into place.

They were happy, they were weightless, and it was easy.

“I’ll be seeing you soon,” George sang, over FaceTime one night, after nagging Dream for twenty minutes to *just turn on your camera, already, I’m going to see you in a week*. “You won’t be able

to hide from me much longer, Dweam.”

“Whatever,” Dream responded, watching as George made his sorry excuse for a sandwich. “I won’t care anymore then.”

“I can’t believe you still care *now*,” George said, rolling his eyes, as he put away the ingredients. “It’s ridiculous.”

“It’s the principle of the thing,” Dream told him, because that’s how he always reasoned it, even if it made no sense.

In a high pitched voice that sounded nothing like Dream, George made a face and mocked, “It’s the principle of the thing. Yeah, okay.” He bit into his sandwich, then said, “You are actually so dumb, sometimes.”

“I can see the fucking lettuce hanging out of your mouth, dude, you’re disgusting,” was all Dream could think to reply.

This shifted the subject easily to George’s eating habits and lack of manners, but the conversation stayed on his mind for the remainder of the day. For so long, he thought about it. He wondered.

Then, he ended up bringing it up to Sappnap.

“I have a question,” he said, from his best friend’s bedroom floor, back against the shut door and Patches on his thighs.

“I have an answer,” Sappnap responded from his gaming chair, completely used to Dream’s random wonders.

“When we met,” he started, with a casualness he didn’t feel, “did I look like you expected?”

Sappnap glanced toward him, surprised he was being asked this. It felt like a question that a fan would ask, not Dream himself. “You were taller.”

Dream looked down, petting his cat, then said with sheepishness, “I know you said *that*, but… I meant—”

“Your face?” Sappnap caught on, and it made it easier for Dream, not having to say it himself.

Dream nodded, relieved.

Sappnap shrugged, swivelling in the chair to face him. “I’d already seen you years ago, so I wasn’t surprised. You just looked older.”

“I see,” Dream responded, quiet. It wasn’t enough, not for him—he looked ‘taller’, he looked ‘older’—he needed *more* than that, but he wasn’t sure how to ask for that kind of specific reassurance.

“Clay,” Sappnap said, and Dream looked up at him. He was smiling, so knowing, because of course he knew—he was his best friend. “You look like *you*—great. It is not disappointing at all.”

Dream’s eyes flickered away, indicating nothing.

Sappnap made a noise. “You are *not* going to disappoint anyone.”

His mouth went dry before he said, “Even George?”

“George?” Sapnap blurted, wide-eyed and raised eyebrows. “George is the one you’re worried about? I thought this was about the fans.”

Dream shook his head, quickly. “The fans’ opinions don’t matter to me.” *George’s does.*

“But George’s does,” Sapnap read his mind.

“I mean...” Dream trailed off, with hesitation. He didn’t know how to explain it in a way that felt normal. None of this was normal behaviour in the slightest.

“I can’t believe you’re worried about George,” Sapnap commented, still surprised. “Him, of all people. He will give the *least* of a fuck, bro.”

“I know,” Dream lamented. He felt like a serial self-sabotager, thinking like this, because he was one—that’s what he was when he really looked inside himself and confronted it. He hated the parts of him that reeked of insecurity and indecision and impulsiveness and anger. He rubbed at his eyes, saw blue-black spots flickering in and out.

“This never mattered before,” Sapnap pointed out, with rightful confusion. “It wasn’t like this with ___”

He cut himself off, then stopped talking entirely. Probably because it instantly became obvious.

The silence in the room was disturbing. He could practically hear Sapnap having his own personal *oh* moment.

Sapnap sighed, got up from his chair to sit beside him on the floor, and placed a hand on Dream’s knee. Patches swatted at his hand immediately, which would’ve made Dream giggle on any other night.

In a softer tone, Sapnap went, “Buddy.”

“Shut up,” Dream muttered, without looking at him, inching away. He couldn’t do kindness right now, he couldn’t be treated with kiddy gloves. Really, he regretted speaking at all; this is why he didn’t talk about this kind of shit, because he was so fucking obvious.

“Dream,” Sapnap tried instead, with a no-bullshit tone, and bluntness that made Dream want to cringe. “Look, I know George is George, and he doesn’t say it a lot, but he loves you.”

Dream nodded, twice, to show he was still listening.

“Like,” Sapnap continued strongly, with meaning, “I’m serious. He *loves* you. Even more than he loves me.”

Dream didn’t entirely agree with that point, but he grinned and joked anyway, “Hell yeah, he does.”

Sapnap snorted. “Shut the fuck up. Point is—he’s been in your life for, what, six years now? Seven, maybe. He still hasn’t seen your face. But he still loves the shit outta you.”

“Yeah,” Dream said, hollowly.

“Y’know why, right?” Sapnap asked, rhetorically, on a roll, but Dream didn’t know where he was going with it, so he stayed silent and waited. “Because he *does not care*. None of this matters to him. Like, obviously he cares a little, because it’s you and he loves you—but if you actually

believe your face is gonna change how he is with you, you're an idiot."

The worst was that Dream already knew all of this. George was the least shallow person he'd met in existence. YouTube and Twitch were filled with people who cared too much about these things, but George was not one of them; he treated everyone the same, and he didn't even have awareness of how attractive he, himself, was. He didn't care about how he presented himself until people had hammered it into his brain that he was, indeed, good looking. And even then, even after gaining a smidge of awareness, he still didn't really care. He'd roll out of bed some days and stream with face cam on, effortless in looking—like *that*. It was infuriating, and ridiculous, and one of the greatest things about him.

"I feel—I dunno, stupid," Dream said, lamely, picking at lint caught in Patches fur, before she jumped off him to do cat things. He watched her go, and added, "For worrying."

"You're not stupid for caring," Sapnap reasoned. "But I mean, I won't lie. You're kinda stupid for thinking *he'd* care."

"Ugh," Dream lamented, then knocked the back of his head against the door. "I need to stop overthinking."

"You're telling me, my guy," was all Sapnap said, and then Patches knocked over an entire glass of water and it broke, splattering everywhere in the room, effectively ending their conversation.

The inevitability of George's arrival loomed over them both, but as a change from before, it didn't activate Dream's flight response. He wanted to fight, instead; he wanted to fight for them, for George to be there, for his happiness—he wanted to be there, to feel every second of it, before and after. Moments like these were precious, he had begun to realize. They were in the before, in this second. And the before was just as important—their history mattered, it was how they'd built this sturdy foundation between them, the trust and respect and devotion. The base of their friendship was so powerful, and together, they had founded it all online.

Did George understand how impressive it was? How valuable? How rare?

Dream knew. Dream cherished it. This kind of feeling—it didn't come along, often. George and Sapnap both, they were different to him, they meant something beyond what people typically meant to each other. And they'd created it with their voices. They'd created it with their vulnerability, and their hearts, and their love.

It was so important to Dream, the before stage. He knew the after would be good too, but—he wanted to savour these last few days, hours, minutes, seconds.

George was going to be here in three days, and Dream hadn't slept for two.

Laying over his covers on his back, he mumbled, sleep deprived as hell, "Might be goin' a little crazy."

"*Sleep*," George told him, gently. Dream could hear birds chirping outside his own bedroom window. It was nine in the morning, and it was true that he should've been asleep. He'd just been overworking, as usual, trying to finish content before George arrived to give them leeway time to relax when he did.

"I'm gonna," Dream reassured, exhausted. "Mind's just wired. Calming down. Talk me to sleep, please."

"What shall I talk about?" His tone was so different in these moments with only them two, his brain registered, compared to when they were around others.

"Mm..." Dream thought, for a little bit. "Talk about how much you love me."

George made a short laugh. "No."

"Ugh, why are you so *difficult*?"

"For fun," George sang. The grin in his voice was so apparent.

Around a pout, Dream whined, "You are no fun."

"Now, I know that's a lie," George said. "You think I am lots of fun."

"No, I don't," Dream lied, petulant. He nuzzled into his covers, pulled them higher. He'd opted to sleep in only boxers, so he could feel his bare legs and naked torso rub against the soft material of the duvet. "Just think you're annoying."

"*Ooh*, I'm so offended, Dream," George said, with a dryness that impressed him.

"You're a meanie."

George made fake crying sounds. "And *you're* a baby."

"No," Dream went, wanting to smile, "you're baby."

George laughed at the joke, but didn't say anything further.

"My baby," Dream said, without thinking about what he was saying beforehand, then paused when he realized what he'd just blurted out. His entire face went warm, and he cringed. "Wait, no, that was—I didn't—"

"*Dream*," George complained. He could hear the blush on his face, holy shit.

"I didn't mean it like that," was all Dream could manage, but he didn't know what other way it could've been meant. It was a slip of the tongue. That was too much, even for them.

"Uh huh," George replied, but he said it so quietly that Dream barely made it out over the line.

Silence filled the phone line, and Dream closed his eyes. He could hear the sound of a shower turning on in the far distance—Sapnap had just woken up. He should really sleep, but he kept thinking about—

"Dream," George said out of nowhere, like nothing had happened. "Tell me a secret."

His eyes opened again. "You know all my secrets."

Exhaling, George said, "No, I don't. I know you."

Dream's mind went blank, until a sudden onset of ideas came rushing at him. *I love you*, he thought, but that was not a secret. *I've thought about kissing you*, he thought, but wasn't one either. Thing was: George knew these things, didn't he? Dream hid behind plausible deniability and

flirtatious tones, but that didn't mean they were untrue. He'd told these things to George before. It was not new.

Here was something new: *I have never wanted someone as much as I want you.*

He couldn't say that, though. It could be misinterpreted. It could ruin them.

Dream said, "I have no secrets, not from you." It was only half-true.

"Then, tell me you love me," George gave up.

Without a fight, he told him, "I love you."

Teasingly, George said, "That easy?"

"I'm very easy," Dream admitted, *at least for you.* It was obvious to everyone, after all.

George hummed, then said, "Beginning to realize that."

"Hey," Dream said. George made a sound to show he was listening. "I like you."

"Dream," George said back, mildly questioning. "What's that supposed to mean?"

If he wasn't so tired that he was melting into the bed, he'd shrug. "Means you're my best friend."

Amused, George asked, "What about Sapnap?"

George always brought this up. "I have more than one best friend, dummy."

He replied, "You always say that."

"Cause I mean it," Dream responded. It was the truth. "Aren't I your best friend?"

George was silent. Chose not to respond at all, even though Dream obviously knew the answer, he just wanted a little bit of confirmation and love.

"Hell-o?" Dream whined, when no answer came after many seconds. "Answer *meeeeeee.*"

"You're so needy," George muttered, under his breath. "What d'you think, genius?"

"Please?" Dream asked, putting on his best sad voice, hoping it would work.

A sigh. Some odd scritch-scratch sounds. George's nails against his stubble, maybe? Dream wondered what it would feel like, if he reached out to touch it. "Course you are."

"Yay," Dream sang, happily. "What else?"

George giggled. "What d'you *mean*, what else?"

"Tell me more nice things," Dream requested, in the sweetest voice he could muster.

"Like what?" George asked, like he didn't want to do it. "You go first."

"I always go first," Dream complained, put out, but he relinquished. "Fine. I'm very excited for you to be here."

George made a sound, like he enjoyed hearing that, even though it was such an obvious thing to be

said. "I'm excited, too," he replied, soft. "No more loneliness."

Dream ached, everywhere. "You won't have to be alone ever again."

"Yeah?" George said, with tenderness. "Give me more."

More, George requested, and Dream wanted to give him everything. "I'll keep you safe," he promised, voice low. "Here, with me."

George made a wounded sound, something Dream had never heard from him before. He almost questioned it, but then George said, "You say these things like..."

"Like?" Dream pressed, wondering. His throat was giving out from talking so much with no sleep.

"I dunno." George's voice was trembling. Then, out of nowhere, George whispered, "You sound really good right now."

His heart stuttered. "Do I?"

"Yes," George replied, not shying away from it. "But you always sound good."

Fuck, Dream thought. "Oh," he said, with faintness. "Are these the nice things?" He regretted asking for it, now, almost. He didn't think he could survive, if George kept going on like this.

"Yes, they are," George said. He spoke with such a tone of determination right now, Dream wanted to bottle the sound and keep it forever. "Y'know what else is good?"

He definitely wouldn't survive. Voice cracking, he asked, "What?"

With vehemence, "*You are.*"

Dream rolled over in his bed, front against the mattress, and hid his face in his pillow. Blood rushed through his ears, hard and fast and swooping. "You can stop now."

George continued, not listening to him. "Your heart is good, your *mind* is—"

No, no, *God*, he'd made a mistake asking for this, he could feel himself—"Stop," he said again, with more strength, needing it to stop before George realized how it was making him feel.

"No," George refused, blissfully unaware. "Do you even realize how—how—*perfect* you are?"

"*George*," he gasped, and his hips rutted involuntarily, providing friction he didn't want. He felt warm, all over, he felt *hot*, he might just die, didn't George understand? He was tense, everywhere. He was fucking—hard, goddamn it, he hated admitting it but *holy shit*.

How had that happened so quickly? It had spiralled beyond control in under a minute.

Dream pressed down, forward, needing relief. In his ears, the word reverberated around, over and over and over. *Perfect perfect perfectperfectperfect*. Uncontrollably, he whimpered.

George went completely quiet. Deafening, suffocating silence. Dream couldn't even hear him breathing anymore.

"Dream?" George whispered, with wonder.

Dream stilled, heart stopping. Jesus, did George know he was—

God, of course he did. He was being so fucking obvious about it.

“I need—” Dream began, shaking.

George stayed very, very silent. Waiting. Holding his breath.

“—to sleep,” he finished, and promptly hung up.

it's impossible to ignore

Chapter Summary

He hadn't needed touch, to love him.

The sun blazed, bright and burning, through the open crevasse of his car's sunroof. Wind whizzed between the strands of his hair, in great need of a cut. It had been months, he realized, running a hand over it to tame its carelessness to no avail.

Dream used to love going on drives before he'd isolated. It had been one of his favourite things to do, driving out on an empty road with the windows down, embracing the early mornings with the sun rising in the distance, sky tinged with shades of orange and yellow and red. In his phone there were two albums, the first titled, *Roadtrips*, the second titled, *Sunrises*. Always documenting. He was good at it, with everything but his face.

He'd drive, look at the skies, breathe in the fresh air of nature. From time to time, he'd think of George while he did it. He'd think of him, and wish George saw the world like he did. He'd think of him, and wish he could see the universe as George did. He'd wish they could understand each other, that they could see the same things in the same ways, and wonder if it might make things easier between them.

There was a fundamental difference in how he and George looked at the world, and Dream wasn't just thinking about it in terms of colour. Somehow, though, in spite of that, they made it work. They made the effort to understand each other, put in the time, and genuinely tried to understand.

Dream didn't do that just for anyone. He wouldn't even care to try.

If Dream was being honest—he didn't want it to be easier, between him and George. He enjoyed that it wasn't. It made it more real.

It was eight in the morning in the middle of a Floridian winter, and the weather was breezy and warm. Sappnap was home, still fast asleep, as was Patches, who Dream had left curled up in the clean sheets of his duvet. His fridge and freezer and pantry were stocked and prepared. His house was spotless, not a single item out of place or speck of dust remaining; he'd spent the previous day cleaning in an attempt to ease his anxiety. It helped, readying himself for this afternoon, it gave him something to do, something else to worry about other than what was to come. There was a bedroom in his house that no one had ever slept in, not one single time, because Dream had always thought it to be George's. It had been there, used for storage purposes, but he hadn't painted the walls or put a bed or desk or chairs in there until—well, up until weeks ago. Soon, it would be lived in.

George would be here within hours. In his state, on the soil Dream called home. And George would go on to put his belongings in that bedroom tonight, and it would become his, finally, after so long of it being no one's.

Dream had painted the walls in a very specific shade of light blue. George didn't know this, yet.

Dream needed to process all of this; he needed to breathe. He went on a drive.

Doing this felt different than it did before, because Dream wanted to drive, he wanted a distraction, he wanted his mind off of it, but George still sat there in his brain, kicking about, rolling around, and the annoying, little pest wouldn't leave no matter how much he begged for a second of relief. It was frustrating, God, George was annoying, even when he wasn't trying to be. Okay, that wasn't fair to him, but Dream was losing it, alright. He was fucking *losing* it.

He couldn't get him off his mind, he couldn't escape, he couldn't stop thinking about how George had sounded when he said—

No, he couldn't even—fucking hell, he needed to pull over. Already. This was a disaster.

He switched lanes, off to the far-right until he was able to park on the side, and turned off his car. Leaning forward, he pressed his forehead against the cool, worn leather of the steering wheel, and let out a shaky breath. Willed himself to forget.

He needed to grasp hold of his sanity, whatever there was left of it.

He'd been able to play it off when it happened, the next morning. And George hadn't asked anything further of it because the fact was, it could've been anything, couldn't it? It had happened over the phone. He could've misheard. It could be denied, and the only person who would know the real truth was Dream.

He was happy George would be here in hours; he was ecstatic about it. But his apprehension still stood within, tall and proud, ready to claw itself out of his body. He was trying so hard to keep it together, to keep himself from going out of his mind.

If George was here, he couldn't hide behind the phone. He couldn't hide behind calls, voices, he couldn't hang up or leave or quit when it got to be too much. In person, there was no hiding. In person, there was only observing, and looking, and confronting. Dream didn't know if he'd be able to handle the terrifying ordeal of being *watched* by George. Because even though George wasn't used to him, his patterns could so easily be recognized. George would be able to read him within seconds of meeting him in real life; he could do it well based off of tone alone, but adding his face to that as well? His body language? Dream was an expressive person, he had the self-awareness to know that at least. He spoke with his hands, had an awful poker face, and felt with every part of his body. His body told on him, at every open opportunity. His body was a *traitor*.

George would notice. George would see right through him.

It would be fine, Dream told himself.

So, George drove him wild, said things which made him question everything.

So, he felt physical attraction to him.

So, he might want him.

He could admit these feelings existed inside of him, and it would be fine. He didn't ask to feel this way, it had just happened without him even noticing, without him being able to stop it.

That was it. That wasn't *new*, not really. It had always been there, at the forefront of his mind, persistent in its reminder of *you are into him, you want him, you think about him like you want to—* goddamnit, it had been so easy to ignore, was the problem, when George was so far. When he wasn't able to be touched. When he couldn't look at him, breathe him in. And he would be able to, in hours.

It would be less easy to pretend all of that wasn't there, inside of Dream, when George was here.

Closing his eyes, he tried to slow his thoughts to a manageable pace. He could... deal with this. Yes, he could. He could manage all of it. He could do it.

Pull yourself together, he pleaded one last time, and when his breathing reverted to normal, he started his engine and began his journey home.

Thirteen minutes after ten, his phone read, when he got back. He'd stopped half-way on his drive to make a quick trip to the grocery, even though they'd been there days ago getting George's favourite foods, but on his way home, Dream had remembered they never bought milk. Dream didn't drink milk, and Sapnap didn't care for it, but he knew George did on occasion. He needed to get it for him. Just in case.

As soon as he was safe inside, the front door locked, it became clear that Sapnap had woken whilst Dream had left.

"Dream?" Sapnap called from another room on the first floor. The dining room, Dream would gage from the sound of it.

Damn, he'd thought he would have more time to himself, more time alone, but he couldn't just be gone, driving all day. He wasn't Quackity, he thought, then chuckled quietly at his own joke. "Yeah, it's me," he shouted, so Sapnap didn't think it was his mom or someone else, and made his way to him.

Sapnap was on the floor, near Patches's food bowl, when he entered, still wearing his pyjamas and clearly not having had his morning shower. "You fed her?" Dream asked, with gratitude; he'd only remembered a few minutes ago.

"Yep, she loves me more than you today," Sapnap said, playing with her little paws, even though Patches loved anyone who fed her, point-blank. "And so does George, 'cause *I* get to meet him before *you* later."

Dream rolled his eyes, annoyance creeping in. "Only 'cause I can't step foot in a freakin' airport, Sapnap."

"Sure, that's the excuse," Sapnap replied, a harmless joke, but Dream still felt stung. He'd always thought he would get to meet George first, but the fact was that they were public figures, airports were public places, and face masks only did so much in terms of disguising their faces. "You'll be all alone at home when Gogy and I meet. We're gonna kiss, y'know?"

"Oh, are you?" Dream asked, amused at the image of Sapnap attempting to kiss George in the airport and George, in turn, attempting to deck him with his angry but mighty little fists. He reached for his phone.

sapnap said you're gonna kiss at the airport, he reported to George though iMessage. It went through immediately; George must've connected to plane WiFi.

"Don't tell him I said that," Sapnap complained, with a laugh, knowing all too well what Dream was up to.

“Too late.” Dream grinned, and his cell vibrated with the reply: *i’m not kissing anyone*.

Well, Dream hadn’t even brought up the two of them kissing, but George made it too easy to bring up. *not even me?* He replied, with the puppy eyes emoji.

He was barely paying attention when he heard Sapnap in his peripheral saying, “You’re such a snake.”

no you smell, George said next, a predictable, childish response, and added unrelated to the conversation at hand, *i have four more hours left. i should sleep, right?*

get some sleep king, Dream replied, then jumped when he heard Sapnap breathing by his ear. He’d made his way over to where he stood without Dream noticing, and was reading their texts over his shoulder.

“Hey,” Dream exclaimed, somewhat embarrassed that Sapnap had read all of that, but he knew it wasn’t some massive secret they acted this way with each other. If anyone, Sapnap had experienced the worst of it.

Sapnap scoffed, but his eyes were filled with mirth. “I need to stop being so curious about you guys.”

He ignored that, and circled back to the subject at hand. “Also, I’m coming.”

Sapnap wiggled his eyebrows, pulling his head away. “You’re *coming?*”

Dream grimaced, then walked over to the kitchen to grab water. “You’re such a child.”

“Okay, but what do you mean you’re coming?” Sapnap asked, with confusion, following after him.

“To the airport,” Dream said, slow, almost as if to say, *duh*.

Sapnap furrowed his eyebrows, watching as Dream filled his glass. “I thought we agreed—”

“I won’t leave the car,” Dream cut him off without looking at him, knowing where this topic was going before it began. “I’ll stay there. We can park in the garage.”

Sapnap thought about this suggestion. “I mean, we can do that,” he said, with hesitance, still unsure about it. “But what if someone follows us back?”

Dream shrugged. “You’ll both be wearing face masks. It’ll be fine.”

“We’ve also both been *recognized* with face masks on,” Sapnap pointed out, as if Dream wasn’t hyper aware of this fact.

“Nick,” was all Dream said, just wanting him to accept the change of plans without pushback.

Sapnap hit him with a deadpan look. “Clay.”

Dream took a breath. “I can’t—I can’t *not* go. I’d... regret it. A lot.” He couldn’t just sit at home, legs crossed and hands in his lap as they met each other. At the back of his mind, there was this awareness that this could all go terribly wrong, but... he thought it might be okay, that they were being paranoid for no reason. He was sincerely trying to let go of all his baseless, irrational paranoia about anonymous-related things, especially now that he was meeting George for the first time. Meeting George meant so many things for Dream: he’d be able to meet his other friends, leave the house more often, he could, perhaps, post a picture of his face online, *finally*. He needed

to stop worrying, and do all of it, get it the fuck over with. Starting here, with this meeting.

“Are you sure?” Sapnap asked, concern dripping from his voice. “You’re not worried about—”

“I *am*,” Dream said, before Sapnap could list every single thing that could possibly go wrong, and make this situation ten times worse on his mental state.

Sapnap peered at him peculiarly. “I can feel the anxiety fuckin’ radiating off you.”

Dream held still, then realized that he couldn’t. “I think I’m just shaking,” he mumbled, stifling a laugh. He was good at laughing at himself; even he could admit he was kind of being ridiculous.

“Dude,” Sapnap groaned, even more worried. “You need to chill.”

“I’m *trying*,” Dream replied, blunt. Did Sapnap think he wasn’t trying to calm down? He’d gone on a three hour drive to make an attempt at it.

Sapnap kept looking at his face. “Maybe you should nap. Sleep it off.”

Dream was not impressed with this advice. “It’s ten thirty, idiot.”

Sapnap raised a single eyebrow. “And when did you wake up?”

Dream paused. “A bit before George left his house.”

“That was like, six hours ago,” Sapnap said. “You’ve been up since, what, three in the morning?”

Dream tilted his head back and forth, sheepish. “Give or take.”

“Oh, my *God*,” Sapnap sighed, “go the fuck to sleep. Now.”

Dream wanted to rip his hair out. He looked around the house aimlessly, trying to find some sort of excuse to get out of it, but nothing was out of place. Everything, they’d gotten ready the day before. Still, he said: “What if there’s stuff to do?”

Sapnap looked like he wanted to slap him silly. “We already *did* everything.” He looked like he was in need of a good rant, like he wanted to complain that they’d done more than enough and Dream had conned him into doing half of it.

“There could be a last minute emergency,” Dream tried again, grasping at straws.

“I’m tired of you,” Sapnap said. That made Dream laugh, at least. “I’ll wake you if it’s important.”

Dream knew him, though. “No, you won’t.” Sapnap would try to figure it out without him; he *hated* waking Dream up, for some reason. He didn’t think he was that bad, in terms of post-sleep grumpiness. “Fine. I’ll... sleep for a bit. But on the couch! And I’m setting fifty alarms for before we need to leave. Do *not* leave without me.”

With an eye-roll, Sapnap said while leaving, voice carrying into the adjacent room, “Just fucking sleep, I don’t care. I’m gonna get ready.”

“Okay,” Dream muttered to himself, making a short walk to the living room. “I’ll... rest...”

He eyed the couch without an ounce of desire, but Patches chose that moment to jump on the armrest, tail flicking happily.

Sighing, looking at her with fondness, he got on and pulled a blanket over himself and a pillow under his head, only for her to step on his head in an attempt to sit on his chest. “*Patches*,” he giggled, adjusting her position to face him. “Hey, you’re lucky your claws aren’t bad right now. That would’ve hurt.”

She meowed quietly, watching him with wide, green eyes, and his insides turned to goo.

“Pretty little angel,” he cooed, and she meowed again. “Sweet thing.”

She began trilling softly, rubbing her head on his chest, back and forth. Her comfort always came at the right times; she could sense it in him, each instance, wanting to provide him with an ease in anxiousness when he was stressed or sad or overthinking. After all these years, he remained astounded at the telepathic abilities that cats held.

“George’ll be here, later,” he confided in her, after a couple minutes of silence, busying himself with scratching her favourite spots. “Gonna be a good girl, today? Gonna be nice to him?”

Her paws crossed over each other, and she watched him without making a noise.

Giving her a smile, he leaned forward to kiss her under her chin, the closest spot in reach. “Yes, you are,” he said for her, and closed his eyes, trying to think about something, anything, any relief from the ongoing thought processes eating away at his mind.

It took time, longer than he would’ve liked—but with the help of her purring, he fell into unconsciousness.

The parking garage was eerily quiet. Sapnap had left the car twenty minutes ago, and Dream sat in the driver’s seat, his texts with George open.

both coming in the car, Dream had relayed to him before he left home, and he hadn’t allowed Sapnap to check his phone while they drove over.

George’s replies were pretty standard. *landed*, then, *at customs*, then, *almost here?*, then, *kinda nervous*.

After Dream had parked in the emptiest area, he had skimmed over the messages and told Sapnap to go find George, help him out with his suitcases, worried about him navigating a new space alone. He wished he could be the one helping him, but he trusted Sapnap to take the job seriously.

parked, sapnap is gonna find you, he sent back, and after, even though he was incredibly nervous as well, had added, *no need to be nervous, will see you soon :)*.

It went quiet for fifteen minutes. Dream switched from Ariana Grande to Travis Scott, thinking that would be more George’s speed, and his phone had vibrated.

A Snapchat, from George. He stared at the notification.

A selfie, it turned out. One of him and Sapnap’s faces squished together, too close to the camera, both with wide grins on their faces. The lighting was oddly dark, as if they had found some random corner of the airport to hide. The caption read, to Dream’s amusement: *snf 4 life babyyyyy*.

He looked at the photo with a laugh, screenshotted it, added the first response that came to his head: *get over here*.

His nerves had eased.

Now, he sat there, thinking too hard again. Waiting.

Minutes passed, and George was once again messaging. *looking for last piece of luggage*, he'd sent. *sap went to pee. said ur jealous*.

Fucking Sapnap. He sighed. And Sapnap had called Dream a tattletale this morning, the little shit.

how much did you pack?, he questioned first, tapping his foot again, nerves unshakable and creeping in again. He took a moment to think about how to reply to the other message, and settled on an honest: *and so what if I am?*

2 and a carryon, George said first, so fast that he must be bored without anyone to entertain him, then a short: *don't be*.

Dream hated it. All he said in reply was, *can't just not be*.

Didn't he get it? Dream liked to think George would understand, had their positions switched. In fact, George had experienced the feeling first-hand—when Sapnap had moved in with Dream, earlier that year, he'd been a menace to them for weeks, salty comments trickling into all of their conversations. Continued to be a menace, on and off, for months. Depending on which side of the bed he woke up on, he flipped between varying shades of resentment. George, of all people, should get it.

don't be, George replied again, used to Dream's antics.

trying, was all he could think to respond, and he added two emojis: one with a frown, the other with a single sad tear.

i'll give you a hug, George said, as if he was really trying to make up for this unfortunate fate which didn't matter much at the end of the day. Maybe he did understand, then, if he was trying. *it'll be better than the one i gave sapnap :]*.

how will it be better? Dream wondered, curious, heart racing from the idea of promised physical contact.

An instant reply, reading: *it'll be longer*.

This made Dream want to smash his head into the steering wheel profusely, but it was probably a bad idea to bruise himself before meeting one of his long-distance best friends for the first time.

Instead of resorting to violent measures, he played it off. *you just wanna hug me*. Acting like this was easy. This, he was used to. This was safe.

shut up idiot, George wrote after a short pause, no denial in sight. God, what on Earth were they saying? He'd be in front of Dream within literal minutes.

might be weird in front of nick lol, Dream replied next, the butterflies floating a storm in his stomach overtaking.

later? George sent, and Dream thought about this, the fact that they were actively planning a hug

in private because they didn't want to do it in front of their best friend. What the hell were they *thinking*?

Two more buzzes. First, *he's back*. Second, *be there soon*.

Dream checked his hair in the visor mirror, adjusted it, but it flew out of place anyway. Hopeless. He rubbed under his right eye, making sure the sleep was gone from it. Okay, he looked fine. Could be better; he was exhausted from the nap he took which ended up being too long, having slept for three whole hours, but alas. He winded the window down two inches, so if they entered the parking garage he'd hear their voices echoing in the distance, and took a quick look around. It was fairly deserted, especially the area they'd chosen. They'd be alright, in terms of privacy.

Listening closely, straining to hear their voices, it took a few more minutes, and then he heard it.

The slam of a door, and George's bright laugh.

Fucking shit hell fuck, Dream thought, nonsensically, and closed his eyes before taking a few, stabilizing, deep breaths. For the billionth time that day, he chanted, *pull yourself together*.

Someone hit his window, soft repeated knocks. He jumped out of his skin from the sound, before looking, and—

All the breath left his lungs.

"George."

George was peering inside the car, an unsure expression painted on his face. "Dream?" he asked, very quietly, and Dream realized—*oh, he's never seen me before*. His windows were tinted, so he likely couldn't see much either.

Swallowing and unbuckling his seatbelt, he opened the car door and got out, shedding his face mask in the process. He looked around them once more, to make sure. Not a person in sight—not even Sapnap. Where had he gone? George only had one suitcase next to him, so Sapnap must've held the others.

They looked at each other, for a prolonged period. George was small, but that was expected. Not as short as Dream had once thought, but—slender, under his outfit, that much was evident. He looked quite comfortable, dressed in his travelling clothes, a thin white athletic long-sleeve and black joggers, face mask pulled beneath his chin. His eyes were even darker in person, and his stubble was prominent, like he'd forgotten to shave this morning. He'd probably packed his razor last night, Dream realized.

"Hi," Dream said, after he'd finished examining him. If he wanted to touch him, he could reach out and do it right now.

It was as if he could see the relief float out of George's body after Dream spoke. "Hey, loser," George said, inclining his head upwards to look at him with a small smile, and affection bloomed in Dream's chest, bright and pure.

"Hi," Dream replied, so incredibly fond, at a complete loss.

The smile on George's face grew, like he was holding in a laugh. "You already said that."

Dream blinked, feeling nothing but awe. "You're... here."

"I am," George confirmed, with amusement. He nodded almost involuntarily to himself, then tilted his chin upwards, at Dream's head. "Nice face."

Dream held his breath for a split second, then snorted. A little anticlimactic, but there it was. "Um, thanks. I think." He rubbed a hand through his hair, embarrassed, then dropped his hand self-consciously, wondering if he'd messed with his hair even more. It was a lost cause.

George's eyes flickered across Dream's face, at the hair, down the long line of his body, so shameless. Dream admired his ability to do it. "This is weird. You're *Dream*."

"I am," he agreed, with a helpless grin. It was his turn to be amused.

George's eyes shifted downwards, as if to watch his teeth, now that they were on display. He shook his head with disbelief, blinking repeatedly. "I meant... I've been hearing that voice for *years*. And now it's just kind of, coming out of you."

Dream gave a short laugh. George was so *strange*, but he also understood what he meant. "That's how voices work, idiot."

"Oh, shut up," George said, with a sigh. He smiled again, leaning on the suitcase, and the happiness was so evident on his face. "I reckon we should get out of here."

"Get in the car," Dream replied. He reached out for the suitcase—the rest of George's stuff would be shipped over the course of the next week. "Where's Nick?" he questioned, bemused, as he walked to fit it in the trunk.

George snorted, watching as he handled the luggage. "He's waiting in the staircase. Said he wanted to give us"—he did air quotes, with his fingers—"some privacy'."

Dream wheezed, shutting the trunk with a too-loud bang, before realizing that Sapnap still had some of it with him. Stupidly, he opened it again with a smidge of embarrassment, then said, "*What?*"

"I know," George said, shaking his head, watching Dream navigate simple car mechanics, like this was entertaining for him.

"He's funny," Dream commented, then squinted his eyes at George. George squinted back, playfully. "Well, you get shotgun."

"I'd get shotgun regardless," George said, with an eye-roll, moving to his side of the car and opening the door. "I'm the *guest*."

"Shotgun is a privilege, George," Dream said, tone grave and jokingly serious, and got in his seat too.

Once they were in, Dream texted Sapnap, *get back here you weirdo*. Looking up, he caught George's eyes on him again, his entire body turned in Dream's direction, but George didn't glance away or pretend he wasn't watching when he noticed. He didn't dare to look beyond Dream's face for a second.

Suddenly, all his insecurities disintegrated, dissolved within him; a newfound peace of mind took over in place. If he'd known George was going to look at him like that, he wouldn't have been so scared. His brain was so dumb, really.

Leaning his head back against his seat, he kept watching George, too. Together, they sat in

comfortable silence, simply looking at each other.

“What?” he muttered eventually, the word quiet amongst them. The music was void, the engine was off, but his own heartbeat echoed in his ears, loud thumps indicating, *you are alive, you are here, you made it, and he is finally here with you.*

George reached a hand out, leaning forward, to push away strands of hair from Dream’s forehead. The tips of his fingers set his skin aflame. Every motion was so gentle; it was reminiscent of a dream he couldn’t recall having. In a murmur, George told him, “You’re blond.”

Dream blinked. Without even thinking, he responded, “You’re cute.” And flushed, because Christ, could he at least attempt to not do this a couple minutes after meeting? This stuff came out of his mouth without him even thinking about whether it was appropriate, sometimes.

A hand went to George’s cheek to hide part of his smile. “Dream,” he said, mild whining to his inflection, and Dream loved the sound of his voice in person. The same, really, having heard it for years—but it *felt* different. It was so different, listening to George talk in front of him. He liked it so much *more*. He never wanted him far from him again.

Behind him, the trunk clanked shut, and he realized Sapnap had returned. He didn’t even hear him putting the suitcases in, too lost in the newness of George’s presence.

“Alright, boys!” Sapnap cheered, getting in the back behind George’s seat without complaint. He slapped his hand against the seat twice, moving George with its force, and they all laughed. Instantly, the energy shifted from peaceful to infectious joy. “Let’s get outta here.”

On their ride home, Dream had a sudden realization: they had not hugged, not once, not shortly, not even with Sapnap absent.

Despite this, the heat of George’s gaze warmed him enough to tide him over. The inevitability of a hug burned even more.

Also on the ride back, Dream made the decision to bite a specific bullet for good.

Kept it to himself, though, because there was a house tour to be had and initial introductions between George and the many rooms of his new home. Patches, unfortunately, was nowhere to be found, and Dream wondered where she could possibly be hiding. Probably in a too-small corner.

“Let’s take a selfie,” Dream said, so antsy that it came out in a burst. They were all in the living room, Dream sitting on the windowsill and Sapnap and George on the couch.

The two of them lifted their heads in unison, stared at him with wide eyes. Like creepy, conjoined twins.

“What?” he asked, on the defensive before they even spoke. He crossed his arms.

“*You* want to *take a selfie*?” George said, incredulous.

“Bro,” Sapnap said, “are you okay?”

Dream cleared his throat, and got up to sit nearer, on the armrest of the sofa. “I... okay, listen. I

thought about it. A lot. It's time."

"What," George said, flat. "It's *time*?"

In a voice so high it rivalled his teenage self, Sapnap asked, "As in time to face reveal?"

"Can you guys be normal about this, please?" Dream asked. His heart was already pounding a little, he was so set on it that he knew they wouldn't be able to change his mind. "I'm already kinda freaking out."

George had nothing to say to that, instead watching him closely.

Sapnap looked at him too, then said with a resigned sigh, "You're already set on this, aren't you?"

"Yes," Dream said, glad he could tell. That made it easier, when they gave up before even trying to talk him out of it. "It's not that much of a shock that I'd do it today, is it? I've brought it up a couple times."

"We thought you'd pussy out," Sapnap admitted, and George hit him on the arm and shot him a dirty look. "What? It's true!"

"Shut up," George said, rolling his eyes, before he looked at Dream. "Alright, let's hear it."

Wait, 'let's hear it'? Dream was confused. "What do you mean?"

George hit him with the most no-bullshit expression he'd ever seen from him. "Dream. I know you. You have it planned out, don't you? What's the vision?"

The vision, Dream repeated internally, then began to laugh aloud, both at his own predictability and how scarily well George knew him.

It was simple, his 'vision', as George put it: a few selfies of the three of them together, Dream placed in the middle for his one, all of them equally in frame, with a simplistic accompanying caption: *together at last*. They took some with George and Sapnap in the middle too, for their own social media and personal records, and he let them come up with their own captions, though George poked at Dream for approval with each of his options. Sapnap, easy-going and uncaring over specifics on social media, didn't overcomplicate it for himself.

The three of them counted down to posting, excitement coursing through them, Dream attempting not to think about how big this was for him.

Within seconds, it was over. Years of privacy, gone. Years of anonymity, vanished. All that anticipation, for this.

Dream kind of wanted to throw up, actually, but he kept taking sips of water to keep his nausea at bay. He stared at his phone, the locked screen, wondering when he'd be safe to check it.

"Gimme your phone," Sapnap said, after they were each done, hand outstretched to Dream.

Wait, he hadn't agreed to that, he couldn't just—"No," Dream said outright, too stubborn.

"*Clay*," Sapnap said, with domineering strength. "Give it to me. For one hour."

Dream scoffed, raising his eyebrows haughtily. "You aren't my mom."

Sapnap rolled his eyes, not having it. "Dream."

Dream eyed his phone for a long moment, looking between it and the hand. He hated giving up access to the internet, in all capacities, but this was a special occasion. He needed to be away from it for a moment, he knew what was going to happen after posting his face on the internet, after all. With an over-dramatic sigh, he placed the device in the palm of Sapnap's hand. Relief settled into his bones, and he knew it was the right call.

"Thank you," Sapnap sang, with a smug smile.

Dream closed his eyes, and leaned back to rest against the back of the couch. "Yeah, yeah."

"Don't worry about it too much," Sapnap said, with so much kindness that Dream flushed. He enjoyed taking care of people a lot, but it felt good to be looked after, too.

"I won't," Dream said, a promised mumble, sinking into his seat.

"Good," Sapnap said, then got a wicked glint in his eye before he added, "you sexy, sexy man."

Dream laughed, flustered, but he had to admit he already felt better now that Sapnap had talked him down.

Sapnap tucked the phone into his own pocket, and he lit up. "Oh! I'm gonna get those cookies your mom made for George."

"Good call," Dream replied, watching as he left the room to get them. When his eyes returned to George, he was already watching with a smile. "What?" he asked George.

George inclined his head toward him, as if to ask back, *what?* Then, checked his phone without answering, opened up on recent Twitter trends. Dream was curious, wanted to ask what the fans had yelled so much that it took over the page, but he refrained from asking.

Instead, he poked George's thigh with his index finger, right above his knee, and let his hand rest there. Asked again: "What's that look?"

George glanced at the hand briefly, before shrugging. "Nothing. He's just good with you."

"He's *good* with me?" Dream said, tilting his head with amusement at the wording. "What am I, his child? I'm older than him."

One side of his mouth quirked. "No, I meant... Now that I'm here, it's easier to be glad you had each other this year."

Dream watched George's expression, with quiet observance. It had a purposeful, careful kind of blankness, but Dream was used to George going quiet around him, keeping all those feelings and thoughts inside. He could read him. George looked away, returning to his phone knowing this, but Dream could tell what was going on in his head.

Earlier that year, it had become obvious that George dealt with the occasional bout of jealousy when it came to his friends being together without him. He didn't talk about it explicitly, but it was incredibly hard to miss. George was so obvious in his envy, more obvious than he'd probably like to be. The fact that Sapnap had the chance to live with Dream first, that *both* got to live together without him in the picture, no chance to join, bugged him immensely. Around each other, they never outright used the word *jealous* regarding the situation, but Sapnap didn't care—he made countless jokes about it, and George played it off when he did, pretending like it wasn't as important to him as it really was.

Dream didn't find any of it amusing. Flattering, sure. Funny, no. George's feelings of jealousy didn't feel appropriate to joke about, not to him; he'd rather revel in the shocking existence of those emotions, than make fun of George for having them at all.

He was glad George was here, that he didn't have to feel that way anymore.

"These are the fucking *bomb*," Sapnap said, on a full mouth, when he returned. He passed the Tupperware in his hands to George, who took one and bit in, and making loud *mm* noises. Dream took note of a crumb on the corner of his pink mouth, then decided to avert his gaze to Sapnap instead.

Sapnap, however, was not looking at either of them. He was looking at the hand Dream still had on George's leg, saying nothing. Quickly, Dream removed it, like he'd been caught doing something wrong.

George, not noticing the exchange, stood up and told them, "I'll be back, I left my water bottle on the counter."

As he was gone, Sapnap gave Dream a pointed look.

"What?" Dream stage-whispered, because Sapnap was looking at him much too accusingly.

His lips twitched, and Dream could tell he was tampering a smile from the way the edges of his mouth were trying to turn upwards. Quietly, so George didn't hear them, Sapnap said: "He's been here an hour, dude."

Dream's eyes widened at the implication. His ears burned. "I'm not *doing* anything."

"Uh huh," Sapnap said, with a slight smirk, and Dream didn't bother trying to reply, giving up.

George reentered the room, unaware of their conversation. He didn't sit, though; instead, he made sad eyes at Dream. "I wanted to meet Patches. Where is she?"

"Not sure," Dream said, apologetic. "Want to find her?"

"She might be in the laundry room again," Sapnap suggested, "or maybe in a bathroom corner."

"Probably in my room," Dream suggested, boastful for no reason considering she was *his* cat.

"That's her favourite place."

"Probably in *my* room," Sapnap snarked, "or are you forgetting I'm the favourite today?"

Dream's eyes narrowed into a glare. "Bet I could find her first."

Sapnap scoffed, swallowing the last piece of his cookie. "You're on."

Standing in front of them, George piped up, thoroughly amused with the show they were putting on: "Patches-hunt, kitten versus three hunters."

Dream laughed at the joke, perhaps much harder than it deserved considering it wasn't that funny. Sapnap, of course, did not laugh at all. Instead, he looked at Dream, no comment, but Dream could read it all over his face. One word: *whipped*.

As if this was a real race, Sapnap proceeded to jog out of the room, the others watching him go. "I'm getting her first," he called, without turning back at them.

Dream looked at George, who looked back with a grin. He stood from the couch and pushed George's shoulders in the general direction of his bedroom. "C'mon, let's go."

Earlier during the house tour, Dream had shown George his bedroom. George had taken one look at it and said very little, other than it being 'very Dream', whatever that meant. Him being there again, so soon after his arrival, wasn't that odd. Dream expected this to happen a lot more; George wasn't a fan of the concept of personal space or boundaries, especially not among the three of them. Dream allowed him to poke around at his belongings; he trusted George to not mess with them too badly.

Probably a wrong assessment, because when he looked up from sticking his head under his bed, George had definitely moved some of the objects around on his desk. It wasn't that bad, at least, though Dream definitely liked things in a certain way. He could deal; he kept his mouth shut. He'd allow George to rearrange minuscule parts of his life, if he wished to—Dream could compromise, especially when it came to the unimportant things.

His closet door was ajar, he noticed when he went back to searching, so he opened it wider and turned on the light. And there she was, hopping off a shelf, onto the floor, in a thump.

"Oh," Dream said, smiling down at her. It looked like she'd just been sleeping in a dark corner.

"Found her?" George asked, to Dream's back. Patches splayed out her limbs, stretching, then walked out between Dream's legs, not paying him any mind.

He switched the closet light off again. "She's here."

George did an exaggerated gasp, then bent down until he was near eye-level with her. "She's so small," he said to Dream, eyes wide with surprise, like he somehow didn't know this.

Dream watched as she walked up to George, with extreme hesitance. She got nervous, meeting new people. He'd be interested to see how this turned out.

"Patches," George cooed, reaching his hand in front for her to sniff. She inched a little closer, and everyone in the room kept still. After a minute of gesturing for her to move in, she finally pressed her nose to his fingers. George gasped again, this time with excitement. "Hi, *hello*."

She meowed back, and George audibly *aww*'d. Dream felt his heart skip.

"She is *so* cute," George said to Dream, who was observing the scene and trying his hardest to keep his cool.

Dream had thought she would need time to get used to George—she could be so prickly around those she wasn't used to—but she was already rubbing her head against his palm, her snout along the length of his palm lines. Patches *loved* George. They loved each other. The mutual approval they had for each other was so overwhelming, Dream didn't even know what to do with himself.

In a honeyed tone, George said to her, "You're so cute, yes! You're so *pretty*." She purred back. Loud. Thrilled. Absolutely enamoured with him, wow.

Dream melted, on the spot, as the two of them made meowing sounds back and forth, their eyes hyper-focused on one another. His kneecaps were turning to absolute mush, as was his brain. He should've prepared more for this moment, but he hadn't even realized how significant it would be to him, watching them meet.

He couldn't stop staring.

George glanced upwards, probably wondering why Dream had gone so quiet, and caught the intensity of his look. He blinked up at him, doe-eyed. “What?” George asked, like he was worried, from Dream’s expression, that he had done something he shouldn’t have.

“I—” Dream started, speechless, then walked up and put out a hand facing upwards, no further explanation.

George looked at it, then at Dream’s face, then took it. Dream lifted him up, toward him.

“What—?” George began again, and came to a sudden stop when Dream pulled him in close.

Both his arms wrapped around George’s shoulders, his nose pressing to the strands of George’s hair. He smelled... clean, with a subtle, natural fragrance. Shea butter.

George’s arms went around Dream’s middle, and Dream could hear him breathing into his chest, making little laugh sounds.

“Shut up,” Dream muttered, into the crown of George’s head, closing his eyes, holding on with everything he had.

“You can’t shut me up,” George said, the little brat, into Dream’s collarbone. That was where his mouth reached.

Dream’s arms went tighter, and George held on with similar strength. One of his hands snaked down, through George’s hair, over his shoulder blades, then along his back. George shivered, and buried his head deeper in Dream’s neck. Dream could feel George breathing there.

The truth was in the past few months, Dream had prepared for a short period of awkwardness between them during their initial meeting, for stilted movements, for nerves to be obvious and present in them both. And there was tentativeness there, that was expected, but he hadn’t prepared for whatever *this* was. This undeniable pull to each other. The lack of resistance; the open acceptance for anything and everything. He hadn’t expected this high voltage of magnetism.

He’d always known they were akin to magnets, but not like this.

He wanted every part that he was offered, and George was offering so much more than he expected. He could have this now, too—in addition to George’s attention, and time, and smiles, and laughs, and all the other glorious moments he had access to by being his best friend. Now, he could touch. Whenever he wanted. And George, of course, could touch back—could initiate, if he’d like, or hold on, like he was at this very moment.

Dream was *fucked*. Dream was greedy, when it came to George. How would he resist, now that he had this? Now that he’d felt this? He was beyond help. His self-control was waning, and he already knew it.

Affection had never been important to him, he had never thought of touch as an aspect he’d deeply desire or even need with someone he loved, but now that he was having it... He was beginning to realize that he’d thought he didn’t need it, because he hadn’t had it at all. Not with George. He hadn’t needed touch, to love him. He’d loved him without, and it had still meant so much.

Now, he loved him with it, and he hadn’t thought he could love him more, but somehow, he did. The adoration was flowing out of him, spilling over the surface, bursting from the confinements of his skin and flesh. He felt desperate for more, now that he’d gotten a little ounce of it.

How would he carry on, knowing this? How was he expected to live with George and be *normal*?

Below them, Patches caught hold of Dream's pants, tugging with her teeth. "Patches," Dream whispered to George, still unmoving, and George hummed in question. Dream felt George's head tilt down to where she was trying to rip his seam open, and he laughed softly.

"Think she wants our attention again," George murmured, and they pulled away from each other at the same time, arms dropping. Still close, but they created some space. Some room to breathe by themselves.

Dream smiled, looking at his face. George was a little pink from their interaction, but he didn't seem upset by it. Just surprised that it had happened at all.

His hand reached out to fix George's fringe. George stood still, allowing Dream to do it, and Dream said, happily, "I got my hug."

A slow smile spread over George's face, at that. No words needed.

"What the *fuck*," came Sapnap's voice, from Dream's open bedroom door. The two of them flinched, whipping their heads to where he stood, giving them an unimpressed look. "Y'all couldn't tell me you found her?"

Late afternoon arrival turned into evening settling-in turned into late night excitement. Their first chance to do things together. Their first day as a trio came, and it went. The perfect array of snacks and freshly bought Wagyu steak, music blasting from the surround sound, their friends's Twitch streams alternating as the hours went by, loaded up on the flatscreen. The living room turned from its usual space to a borderline sleepover area, the three of them bringing in their blankets and pillows after each of them took a shower to clean themselves off, and they switched from Twitch to Netflix.

An anime, Sapnap had suggested, *a drama*, Dream had suggested, *I don't care*, George had said, to which they'd all laughed.

They settled on two comedies. The first, they laughed so hard that they cried, falling over each other in giggles, barely able to look at each other before they started laughing again. It felt like *them*.

The second, well. It sucked.

"Who the hell picked this?" George whispered to him, forty minutes into the film. The three of them were on the floor, backs against the bottom of the couch, settled into their blankets. To their sides, a bowl of buttery popcorn sat mostly eaten, most of the cookies his mom had made finished, water bottles half-filled.

It had been Dream, but— "Nick picked it," Dream lied, trying not to smile.

George snickered, looking over at where Sapnap had passed out beside him, mouth open and drooling onto his pillow. "Sapnap is dead asleep right now. I cannot believe him. On my first night here?"

"He's the weakest link," Dream wanted to laugh. "We were up *before* him, this morning, too."

"I think he got really hyped and wore himself out," George commented, amused. "He was jumping

around and screaming for ages.” That was true. They’d had a little sing-and-dance party as they made the steak and potatoes and veggies, which wore them out. Cooking in general wore Dream out, completely—it was why he usually got his mom to help, in that regard.

Dream moved even closer to George, bumped shoulders with him. “Can you blame him? He was excited.”

George did a happy sigh, and nodded. Very quiet, he said, “We all were.”

“Oh, wait,” Dream said, the realization coming to him. “We both took naps, I forgot. He didn’t.”

“Ah,” George replied, then went with a grin, “let’s not mention that part when we tell him he’s out the gang.”

“Mhm,” Dream said, now watching George more than he was the movie. George was still grinning at him, and his eyes went to his smile. He had a nice smile. He smiled a lot, but Dream wanted to make him do it even *more*.

Unthinking, one of Dream’s hands reached out for George’s jaw. It wasn’t too soon to touch his face, was it? George had touched his, in the car, mere minutes after meeting. The entire length of his torso had been pressed against him all night, he reasoned—he was allowed to hold George’s face.

“What are you doing?” George asked, so soft as his eyes followed Dream’s movements, but not moving away. Allowing it. Encouraging it.

He didn’t let the question stop him. Cradling George’s cheek in a hand, thumb moving against the roughness of his chin. “Your stubble,” Dream said, mindlessly, and kept touching it.

George’s mouth parted, but he still did not move. “What about it?”

“I’ve just”—Dream swallowed—“always thought about touching it. Is that... weird?”

George blinked. Dream stopped, froze, waited.

What was he thinking? Of course it was weird, holy shit.

“It’s...” George trailed off, then breathed slowly out of his nose, and smiled only with his eyes. “I mean, it’s kinda weird. But we’re weird, aren’t we?”

Dream let out a short laugh. “Uh huh.” He pulled his hand back, still watching him. He felt like he had so much to give, right now, but a lot of it felt like too much. Too soon.

Sapnap gave a loud snore next to them, but Dream couldn’t sway. George didn’t laugh, didn’t move an inch.

In a whisper, Dream told George: “I like how your eyes look this close.”

George’s eyes crinkled at his compliment, this near. *One two three four*—oh, George’s laugh lines were so prominent, more than Dream had even realized before. Dream could count each of them. When he smiled, his entire face scrunched up. Dream wanted to commit this image to memory.

George moved even closer to him, eyes opened wide. “How about now?”

Dream shook his head with disbelief. Even when he was trying to be obnoxious, he was so...

“Even prettier,” Dream said, and all the tension left George’s body. His face was right there, and he

was letting Dream examine it. His eyes were the shade of fucking coffee beans. Who the hell was he? How was he allowed to look like this? His pupils blown and the whites of his eyes pearly, the stark contrast between them distinct, the size of his irises incredible. Dream didn't even know what he was saying anymore when he added, "So *brown*."

"Ha," George mumbled, and his eyes went a little sad. "I can't see yours, not entirely." It was dark, in the living room right now, the only light being from the television and the room next to them, and two lamps a few metres away. In this lighting, he didn't think George would be able to see much anyway.

"They're not that special," Dream promised him, despite his eyes being one of his favourite features.

"No, I mean—" George cleared his throat, and Dream's interest was piqued. George seemed almost *embarrassed*.

He wanted to hear what was on his mind. "What?"

"Well," George began, and they were so close that Dream could kind of feel George's breath on his cheek. "Like, I can't see the colour, but I can still tell they're—nice."

Dream hid a smile, not wanting to scare George off by making him think he was making fun of him. He was being so earnest; he treasured each time he got like this. "Nice?"

George gave a cautious nod, just one. A blink and miss it moment. "Long eyelashes."

He couldn't stop looking at George. And truthfully, Dream had known this would be a problem, that he'd get caught staring at George because George was so easy to look at. Easy on the eyes. It was a fact known by all: George was *beautiful*, notoriously so.

What he didn't expect, was this:

George couldn't look away from him, either.

Nothing was said for a minute, the two of them flickering eyes between the movie and each other, knowing neither were truly paying attention to the plot. Dream couldn't even remember the name.

"What are you staring at?" Dream said, eventually, without looking at him. Trying to combat the bashfulness he felt from the weight of George's gaze.

"You," George admitted, near his ear, free and unashamed.

"Stop looking at me," Dream said, voice small. He turned his head, pulled his blanket further up over his chest. "I feel shy."

George grinned, so much fondness in his eyes, and Dream thought he might pass out if George kept looking at him like that, if he continued to in the coming days. "You feel *shy*?"

"It's weird, being looked at," Dream tried to explain, throat tight. "Not used to it."

George hummed, thoughtful. Thinking about what that meant, for Dream. Then said, "You're nice to look at." Like he had no idea what it meant, for him to say such a thing.

"*Jesus*," Dream breathed, sinking into his makeshift bed. He could feel the effect of the compliment, making him lightheaded. "Enough, please."

“This is fun,” George said, with a laugh, still watching his reaction. “Now I know why you do it to me so often. It’s even more fun when I can see your face.”

Dream made a dismissive noise. “I don’t *just* do it to make you uncomfortable.”

He thought George would play that off, but all he did was nod, taking this reveal seriously. “You mean it,” George said, like he knew.

Dream’s mouth was dry. “I mean it,” he confirmed, breathless, quiet.

“I mean it, too,” George said, easily, and that was—oh. He meant it? He meant all the things he was saying to Dream, that he always said to him, all the things that could be seen as pandering or jokes or blurring lines.

Unpacking this might take some time. He didn’t even know where to start.

Quiet settled over them. No one spoke. The movie played in front of them, comfortable silence enveloped them like a warm blanket.

Ten minutes passed, and then Dream looked over again. George was still watching him. He didn’t know if he had even looked away at all.

Instead of calling him out, Dream took this in, let it settle inside him. Held it for himself to enjoy. And whispered, “I don’t want to go to sleep,” in the darkness between them.

George sighed. His eyes were drooping a little, but he continued to stare, unwavering. “Why not?”

“This might be the best day of my life,” Dream told him, heart doing somersaults. “I don’t want it to be over.”

“Dream,” George returned, so sweet that it hurt Dream to listen to. “This is how it’ll be every day now. It’s not going to be over ever again.”

That struck him. *Unlimited happiness*, he thought. It could become a drug, being around George, the euphoria he got from it. Dream had promised himself growing up to stay away from dependent substances, but nothing could’ve prepared him for the addictive nature of George’s presence.

“I know that,” Dream said, and he did, even if it was hard to come to terms with. It was too new to accept in a few hours. In a rush, he said, “It’s all just been so good. Too good to be true. I’m so fucking *happy*.” It didn’t feel real, being this happy. Dream didn’t know if he was allowed it.

“I’ve only been here a day,” George said. “Wait a month. You’ll be trying to ship me back.”

“I’d never,” Dream promised him. *Now that I have this, I’m never letting it go.* And the imminent, looming knowledge of *more* hung over them. There was so much more to come. Dream knew it. He felt that in his spine, tingling heat at the tail of it.

There was so much more for them to do, for them to give each other. It was only the beginning.

devour me, devour me

Chapter Summary

Intimacy evolved in shifts, Dream came to realize.

Chapter Notes

Heed the updated tags before reading, please. :~)

See you at the finish line.

If asked how he felt about the time that passed after George's arrival, one word would come to Dream's mind: exceptional. Weeks blended into one another, not because the transformative stage was anything beyond precious, but rather because Dream felt like he was floating through the days with aimless direction. Unfiltered joy took over, a happiness that he had never experienced brimmed inside him until he no longer felt grounded to life. Clouds held him up beneath his feet. He awakened every morning, lounging in the sensation of fresh beginnings, of having a greater purpose. He had been refreshed. Revitalized. Regenerated, an entirely new being.

Even Sapnap took note of the improvement, saying that Dream was borderline unrecognizable, that he'd never seen him so social, so willing to interact, so alive.

Dream didn't think he was all that different; he just had more to live for.

Perhaps it wasn't healthy, thinking of his life with this perspective. He'd always considered himself to be an ambitious person; he was hardworking, focused, forever determined to attain his goals. His aspirations were found primarily in work; that was where his passions laid, at the end of the day. What brought him joy was creating content, being *good* at it, pushing the boundaries that others had set before him, and impressing people he respected.

He liked being impressive. That was his whole shtick.

It couldn't be his entire life, though.

In retrospect, he'd come to a startling realization: he had become complacent. Not with his work, or with his ambitions, but with his happiness.

Happiness was not equated to being comfortable. He'd been so comfortable, working on projects, cruising through the months and achieving validation through productivity. He hadn't even realized how unhappy he'd been. Maybe unhappy was the wrong word; he hadn't necessarily been *sad*, or maybe he had been, if he compared then to now—but he didn't enjoy brooding on that fact.

Here was the reality that had been his life, the past year:

He couldn't leave his house, not at all, not safely, not without gut-wrenching anxiety. He could count the number of people he'd seen in person on both hands, the total being Sapnap and certain

family members. He hadn't been able to meet the countless friends he'd made through YouTube, the ones which brought him comfort when he spent time with them, even when they chose to visit his state, simply because he needed to meet George before them. Sapnap and George were his best friends; they deserved to see him first, he owed that to them after everything they'd been through together.

It was a choice he consciously made for himself, and he didn't know why he felt it to be important, but he felt more devout to that promise than any religion he'd been taught in his upbringing.

He was stubborn as hell, to a fault. He was *decisive*. He, unfortunately, had limited access to vitamin D and fresh air, except during the times he chose to utilize the pool in his backyard or sit on his patio for a moment to properly breathe.

He'd been stuck.

It wasn't a good feeling, feeling stuck, unmoving and unhappy. It was easy to get used to, though. It was easy to settle into, to accept as his new normal, but it wasn't happiness. Not really. Emotional fulfillment came through achievements and friends online. It was fine, but it wasn't *good*, no matter how hard he tried to convince himself of it.

George stepping foot in their home changed it all. For him, for them, for everything.

Here was the reality that had been his life, the past few weeks:

He'd met George, finally, which opened up an entire houseful of doors in regards to opportunities for Dream. He could be with his best friend, speak to him in person, touch him, laugh with him. He could make plans to meet their other friends. Punz, Karl, Quackity, all the rest that he allowed into his heart. He no longer needed to fear being recognized in a public setting by his voice, because he'd given up on anonymity. He could meet fans, if he wished to. He had the chance to leave his house happily; he could spend time with his friends and family in settings other than the privacy of his home. He could go to his favourite places, the ones he'd long forgotten.

He could do what he wanted, within reason, whatever might bring him happiness.

He was *free*.

Everything had changed. For the better.

The limitless potential for freedom had never been so overwhelming, and—

A knock on his door spared him from his thoughts. A few beats passed before Sapnap pushed the door ajar, poking his head through the open space. "Hey," he said in greeting, and Dream shucked his headphones to hear him, nodding in question. With hopeful eyes, Sapnap asked, "You wanna grab lunch with me and George?"

Instinct told him to respond with a resounding *no*. He'd given that answer to Sapnap countless times the past few months, when he'd asked if Dream wanted to get a bite with him, go to an event, hang out elsewhere, anywhere but their house. It had hurt telling him 'no' in so many instances, but Dream had become desensitized to delivering the rejection.

He didn't need to give into instinct anymore, though. Not when there was nothing binding him to his house.

Relief settled into his skin, a small smile blossoming on his face. "Um... yeah, actually." He nodded. "I'd love to. Give me time to change?"

Dream could see Sapnap physically relax after his response. He smiled back at him, and told him with a lighter tone, “George still has to shower, don’t worry. We won’t leave for another half-hour.”

“I’ll drive,” Dream offered, already feeling excitement from having plans to *leave* with his friends. They’d spent so much time the past few weeks together, helping George get set up and fixing last-minute things, streaming here and there to give the fans meet-up content, but they hadn’t gone anywhere as a trio as of yet. Not only had they wanted to enjoy each other’s company, but Dream had feared fans crowding them so soon after the meet-up.

“Okay,” Sapnap said with a grin. “Hit me when you’re ready.”

Fifty minutes later, he was in the foyer sitting in one of the chairs as he laced up his converse, when he heard the loud, sporadic footsteps of what must be George.

“You took fucking forever,” Dream complained, just to rile up George a little, before he looked up, and he was greeted with long, bare legs.

It was hot outside this afternoon—a warm winter week in their city—and George was wearing *shorts*. Nice black shorts, too, not just basketball shorts, and a deep-green shirt which brought out the chocolate colour of his eyes. What the *hell*. Dream had never seen him wearing this before in his life.

Dream blinked at him, struck stupid, as George moved in front of him to put on some shoes that looked like they’d barely been used before, a pair from his collecting days, not noticing that Dream was having a moment.

“That is *not* my fault. Sapnap saw me wearing sweats and threw his gross clothes at me, the idiot. He was all”—George began using a voice that sounded similar to a mimic of Shrek, nothing like Sapnap at all—“‘they’ll kick us out of the nice restaurant, idiot, you look ridiculous’. So, I had to change.”

Oh. Well, that explained it.

Christ, that meant he had Sapnap to thank for this then. Maybe he should buy him a box of Pokémon cards. Support his gambling addiction.

Dream cleared his throat, and his mind from thoughts of *skinskinskin*. “You look good.” He tried to sound blasé about it, but George must’ve heard something in his tone and turned to look at him properly. Hurriedly, he changed subjects. “Wait, what d’you mean it’s *nice*?”

Sapnap showed up, in the midst of fastening a cap over his head. “It’s a nice patio,” he said, obviously having heard them chatting. “We’re *celebrating*.”

“Celebrating what, exactly?” Dream asked, standing from his seat. He patted his pockets for his keys and wallet, trying not to think about the fact that he had not mentally prepared at all for the concept of George in attire for heated environments. He felt like an enamoured old-age admirer, vying after someone he felt attraction towards by spiralling over their uncovered skin.

Sapnap raised his eyebrows. “Everything. Us being together, finally. And your freedom or whatever. I’m proud of you, bro.”

George made fake gagging noises to their side, and Dream began to laugh. “What the fuck? We don’t need to celebrate that.”

“Yes, we do,” Sapnap protested, reaching up to punch Dream’s shoulder. “I get to go outside with my *best* friend.” He paused. “And George’ll be there too, I guess.”

Dream hid a smile, looking at George who glared daggers at Sapnap before he walked out the front door. “Just for that, Sapnap’s paying.”

It was nice outside, despite it being the wintertime. Bless Florida. He was silent while driving on the way there, the sound of his friends bickering mixed with Quadeca playing from Sapnap’s phone. Bright and warm, red-hot sun heated their skin. Dream had chosen to wear thin long black pants compared to the other two who had on shorts, but his choice of a short-sleeve button up had him wishing he’d rubbed sunscreen on before he left. He tended to burn when the sun was in the mood to be particularly nasty, and it was relentless this afternoon. He liked it, though. The breeze wasn’t bad, and the good weather made him feel like he was being welcomed back, in some capacity.

It might’ve been weird to say thank you to the sky, but as he peered up at the sun, sunglasses firmly in position, he felt a newfound appreciation for how it shined upon him. The wind sang like a choir, the sun loved on his skin, gravity held his body upright—he’d returned to civilization. Was it possible to feel adored by the Earth? Well, Dream did. He felt emotional thinking about it, and that was okay; no one had to know he was being so sentimental about this moment, his first steps outside with his loved ones in so long, but he thought Sapnap might know how important this was to him.

A patio table was ready for them when they arrived, and the first thing they ordered were three drinks—a beer for George, a ginger ale for Sapnap who made sure to complain about drinking laws after he requested it, and an ice-cold water for Dream.

Sapnap did end up paying, it turned out, after two hours of talking and eating off each other’s plates. Dream protested various times, tried to convince him not to because he *liked* being the one to pay for them, but Sapnap slipped the waitress his credit card when Dream wasn’t looking.

“I wanna pay,” Sapnap explained, after he saw Dream pouting. “We’re celebrating! I’m treating y’all.”

He sounded so much older when he talked like that, and Dream felt a brief sting of pride for the man Sapnap had become. It was odd, being there with them, after everything he’d seen from their childhoods to now. They were grown-ups. Living together, paying taxes. They’d come so far from petty Skype fights and embarrassing stories about their first times.

“Oh, now you want to be nice to me,” George spoke up, seemingly untouched by the gesture. Dream grinned, knowing it was George’s way of saying *thank you*, because he enjoyed being difficult; he hid apologies and thanks in insults, recognized kind actions by complaining about them.

Sapnap sighed, and Dream took that moment to sip at his water. The wrong move, because Sapnap chose to reply with, “You know how much I love you, kitten.”

Dream choked loudly and George burst into laughter, patting at his back with force. Dream reached a hand under the table, resting it above George’s bare kneecap in thanks. He consciously chose not to move after George didn’t react to the touch, liked the feeling of his skin against his fingers, and wondered if George liked it, too.

All George said in return was a snarky, “Shut up, Sapnap.”

Dream heard a *thump*, followed by Sapnap yelping and going, much too loud considering they were surrounded by other people, “Ow, what the fuck, dude?”

George had likely kicked him under the table, Dream deduced; Sapnap was sitting on the opposite side from them, directly across George.

“We are in *public*,” Dream pointed out, after he’d wiped his mouth clean with his free hand. It was like taming children with those two; one would think Dream was the eldest from the way they acted.

“What would you rather I have called you?” Sapnap asked George, with a smirk that couldn’t possibly be going anywhere good. “How ‘bout, ‘Dream’s bitch’?”

If Dream was drinking water, he’d have choked again. Simultaneously, Dream and George replied, in equally scandalized and admonishing tones, “*Sapnap*.” Dream picked up his hand at that, moved it back to his own lap; it felt like a bit much to keep touching him when Sapnap was making jokes about one of them being the other’s bitch.

Sapnap made a disturbed face. “It’s so fucking creepy when you guys do that,” he said first, then added, “also, it makes me feel like I’m your kid or some shit. Stop.”

George made a face back, scrunched in disgust. “Can *you* stop? You’re being weird.”

Dream chose to keep his mouth shut, looking around at the other customers seated. No one seemed to recognize them, which was good—Dream didn’t think he could take this outing being both his first fan encounter as well as his first outside leisure time in months.

Sapnap scoffed. “Yeah, *I’m* the weird one between us three.”

That felt a little too close to a conversation he did not want to touch, and Sapnap wasn’t one to hold back when he started dragging them, so Dream decided to cut in with a firm, “Fuck off, Nick,” hoping he caught the hint.

“*Ooh*, daddy’s gonna beat my ass,” Sapnap taunted, unbothered. “I need to piss, B-R-B.”

“Did he just say that out loud?” George muttered to Dream, stabbing a fork too hard into the leftover bits of his carbonara.

“Yep, he’s a loser,” Dream confirmed, tapping his fingers absentmindedly against his own thigh. Once, twice, thrice—and George’s hand settled over his, stopping his movements.

Dream turned to him in question. George stared back, unwavering, picking up Dream’s hand and placing it in the same place it had been on his leg before. And George went back to eating, as if none of that had happened.

Suddenly, his mouth felt like he’d consumed ash, and his hand felt like it had been set on fire.

Skin, he thought happily, but this time he got to touch. This time, George wanted him to touch. He would never get used to the astonishing reveal that George liked being affectionate, especially with *him*, a fact that he’d learned the second George settled in.

Fingers tightening on George’s thigh, skin against skin, he cleared his throat and said, “This has been nice.”

“Yeah?” George asked with food in his mouth, before he swallowed. “I bet it’s been weird, for

you.”

Dream raised an eyebrow in silent question.

“Y’know, ‘cause you haven’t been out in ages?” George clarified, with clear interest in his response.

“Oh,” Dream said, softly. That meant George understood, too, how important this was to him, and of course he did. Dream underestimated him, sometimes. “I... yeah. Weird is one way to put it.”

George observed him with kind eyes. With more care than before, he asked, “Good?”

Dream nodded, feeling exposed. “Very good.”

“I’m glad,” George responded, and his voice lowered, as if he was going to say something of importance. “I know that, um. That you haven’t been able to hang out with anyone. Because of me.”

Dream paused, thrown. “No, that was because of *me*. Not you.”

George put down his fork, shrugging a shoulder. “Kind of because of me, though.”

“It wasn’t,” Dream said, tone firm. *Don’t blame yourself for my choices*, he pleaded. Because they were absolutely his choices, at the end of the day, and George had never asked him to do that, would never request such a thing of him.

“Dream, stop.” George’s hand settled over Dream’s, holding it gently against his thigh, thumb rubbing over the knuckles in soothing motion. “It’s fine.”

His jaw clenched in protest; he needed it to be clear. “It was my choice.”

“Your choice, that you made because of me,” George argued. Their gazes met, stubborn.

“*George*,” Dream complained, shaking his head. This wasn’t just one of those senseless subjects they could argue about for hours, it was important to him. “Can you give me this one?”

George lowered his eyes. Didn’t look at him. His thumb settled in the space between Dream’s own and his index finger, pressing down between them. “I don’t think you get what I mean.”

Dream’s eyebrows furrowed at that. “What do you mean?”

“What I mean,” George began, before raising his chin to look at Dream in the eyes again, “is thank you.”

Dream blinked. The breath stuttered out of him in surprise.

George was being *sincere*.

“That’s all,” he finished. Their hands remained in place, and George’s thumb pressed in again, as if to remind Dream: *I’m here. I meant it. It might not have been for me, but thank you for waiting.*

“You don’t need to thank me,” Dream mumbled, when he regained his voice. “Don’t be stupid.”

George twisted his mouth, and his spare hand reached for his beer to finish it off instead of answering. Dream watched as he drank, watched as the slope of his neck moved as he leaned back to drink from it, the gulps rippling along his throat as he swallowed the beer. He thought of

George's words as he took him in.

George caught him watching after he was done, raised a single eyebrow, and wiped at the wet corner of his mouth. "Gonna stare at me forever?" he teased, in a deserved call-out.

"Maybe," Dream murmured, not thrown off by the directness for once. "What are you gonna do about it?"

The beginnings of a smile formed on George's lips, he opened his mouth to speak, but—

The chair in front of them squealed against the wooden flooring. "The bathrooms here are kinda gross," Sapnap muttered to them, as he settled in his chair. "Might wanna hold off until we're back."

George's smile veered into one of devilish delight. "Dream's gonna have an accident if he has to wait that long."

Sapnap started snickering, while Dream scoffed at the overdone joke. "Idiot."

The moment passed, but George's words sat in his head and refused to leave, persistent in its staying power. He couldn't forget, not even if he tried.

Returning to his everyday schedule with George there proved to be difficult. So much was easier with them living together in Dream's house—actually, it was *their* house, even if Dream paid for everything. He considered it to be their home. Joy came effortlessly, social interaction was more common, his own anxieties lessened tenfold. It was good.

But Dream liked routine. He liked precision. He liked things just so.

He ate particular foods, cooked them in specific ways, worked out on certain days, called his mom to check-in at scheduled times. There were things that he was more lenient with, in regards to his routine; for example, creating content happened on more of a once every two weeks basis, even if editing tended to come in days following a recording session. The only aspect that was truly unfixable, in terms of his routine, was his sleeping schedule. That would be a lost cause until the end of time for a variety of reasons. He went, went, went, until he couldn't go anymore—sleep came when it was necessary, not on schedule.

He did life like this because it had benefited him countless times before.

George moving in had shaken his routine, but not necessarily in a debilitating way. It was simply that everything was in dire need of readjustment. Sapnap's move-in had less of an impact, mostly because with Sapnap, little had changed in his day-to-day life. He hadn't been able to leave the house yet, and they gave each other quite a bit of space.

George didn't act like Sapnap, not in the slightest. George required attention. George needed constant brain stimulation. When he wasn't with Dream, he was with Sapnap. When he wasn't with either, he was on call with Quackity or Karl or in one of their servers.

George liked to be entertained. George liked to entertain. He didn't live his life in routine. He took life as it came. He ate when he felt hungry, which could be between one to ten times per day. He called his mom when he wanted a chat, or he went days without talking to her if he didn't feel the

need for it. He streamed when he had the urge, which could be never or three times a week, if he was particularly bored. George was unpredictable; he did whatever the hell he wanted.

Dream didn't live like that, but he respected that George did. It was refreshing, and kept the energy between them interesting. It was a huge reason why he enjoyed being friends with George; their differences made their friendship more engaging. It kept him on his toes.

Still, he needed to revert back to his routine at least *somewhat*—he hadn't worked out in three weeks, for example, since George moved in. He was beginning to feel it.

"George, move," Dream said from his position on the couch, where George's legs were splayed over his, blocking him from getting up. Sappnap had left them an hour ago, citing his need for a nap, but Dream and George remained glued at the hip, sitting in each other's silent company.

"Mm?" George mumbled, not looking away from his phone. Dream made an irritated noise, and George snorted, still not glancing at him, and muttered: "Ugh, what? You want attention?"

"No," Dream protested, mildly annoyed by the assumption, then sighed. "I want to leave. You're all over me." It wasn't a real complaint, more a factual statement.

George finally looked up. "You're going?" he said, giving him the saddest eyes, the devious asshole.

Dream wanted to smile at the blatant display of neediness, but held back. "I'm gonna work out."

George wrinkled his nose, like he couldn't comprehend what would possess a person to do such a thing. "You're leaving me for *that*?"

"I'm not *leaving* you," Dream responded, entertaining George's petty excuse for an argument because he knew George enjoyed arguing for the sake of talking more than anything else. "I'll be back in like, forty minutes."

"Ugh, but I'm so *bored*, Dream," George whined, as if Dream had somehow been helping him remedy that this entire time. He hadn't; they hadn't spoken to each other in close to an hour, so his lack of presence shouldn't be much of a change. Then, unexpectedly, instead of making an effort to move, he made a considering noise and asked: "What if I watched?"

Dream blinked, caught off guard by the request. George eyed Dream's arms, in wait of his reply. "You want to *watch*?"

"Yeah," George said, with eyes now full of intrigue. "I wanna watch you do it."

"Uh," Dream went, unsure of this turn of events. "Oh... 'kay? Sure. Why not?"

George scoffed at the reaction, removing himself from his legs. "I just have nothing else to do, chill."

Dream felt the urge to laugh, because who the hell wanted to watch another person work out? George was so bizarre, sometimes. Getting off the couch, he stretched his arms as high as he could above his head. "You're that bored? Jeez. Wanna join me instead?" He reached a hand out to him in offering, though he didn't expect George to accept.

George laughed shortly, then said with unparalleled dryness: "Good joke." But he still took Dream's hand to boost himself off his seat. "You wearing that?"

Dream glanced down at his sweatpants and hoodie; he should probably switch into basketball shorts and a t-shirt, something more breathable. “Nah, I’ll change real quick.”

Mischief flickered across George’s face. “Can I watch that, too?”

Dream huffed, shoving at his shoulder before untangling their intertwined fingers. “You’d like that, you freak.”

“I was kidding, obviously,” George said, with a sly grin. Dream rolled his eyes. “I’ll get us water, go do whatever.”

“Oh,” Dream said, blinking at the unexpected show of thoughtfulness. “Sure, thanks.”

There were five bedrooms in their house, where the last two had been turned into a spare room and an office. Although he kept his workout equipment in the garage, he moved it over to the office for the evening. He only needed the weights, anyway. He’d stretch, do some lunges, a few dozen push-ups and sit-ups, the usual amount of reps with his dumbbells, maybe end it off with some yoga if he felt up for it, but he kind of thought George would make fun of him if he started getting into bendy positions.

Forty-five minutes was around the usual time it took him to work out, on a good day. Sometimes he’d watch an episode of a show on Netflix as he did it, or listen to his podcasts. If he was in the zone, he might blast music and go at it for as long as he could.

That afternoon, it took him an hour to get to the weights, and that was entirely because George was choosing to be a distracting menace.

“You’re so *annoying*,” Dream complained, when George flicked water at him for the fifth time during his sit-ups. He sat on the floor, yoga mat beneath him, and motioned for George to pass him the dumbbells that were by his chair.

“Get them yourself,” George told him, playful and snappish, “if I’m so annoying.”

Dream gave a dramatic sigh, stood up to get them himself. “You’re too afraid to pick them up, aren’t you?”

“I could do it in my sleep,” George said, unmoved, bored expression painting his features.

Dream opened his phone to switch the song that was playing low on the speakers nearby. Settled on EDM. Picked a decent starting weight, after standing. Began his reps. Focused up, got in the zone, until—

“That’s all?” George spoke up, after two minutes of watching him, with a mocking tone. His knees were pulled up to his chest in his chair, clad in grey sweats and a nondescript black shirt. He’d been alternating between looking at Dream and his phone for the past hour, but it seemed like he’d finally locked his phone and settled on watching Dream instead.

Dream grinned, continuing his movements. Oh, George was gonna be like *that*. “You want more?” he asked, between the motions.

With haughtiness, George raised his chin. “I’d like more.”

Of course you do, Dream thought privately. He tilted his own head, thinking about it, and gave in. “I’ll give you more, then,” he decided, voice slow as molasses, before moving to switch the weights up two notches.

Dream didn't like to lift that much at once, preferred to stay in a comfortable zone, but he was never one to back down from a challenge. Plus, he kind of wanted to see the look of surprise on George's face when he realized it wasn't that hard for him. He'd done it before, it simply wasn't his preference.

He started up again. It wasn't as bad as expected. "That more impressive to you, your highness?" Dream asked, voice strained compared to before.

George gave Dream a once over, licking his lips, and cleared his throat. "You're pathetic."

"Fuck you," Dream said, snorting a laugh. His eyes went to George's mouth, pink and shiny from spit. "I'd like to see you do it."

George scoffed. He brought his knees down, settled his elbows over his thighs to lean forward. "I don't have to prove myself to you."

"Oh, yeah?" Dream asked, raising an eyebrow.

George's gaze was blazing. "Don't make this about me. You're the one in the hot seat."

"You're the one who's been staring at me all night," Dream returned, without having to think hard about it.

"I have not been staring at *you*," George rebutted, fast and easy, despite the pink splotches that splayed over his cheekbones from the jab. "You're just incredibly unimpressive—"

"Uh huh?" Dream asked, as he continued his reps.

"—and bad—"

He smirked, amused at George gaining momentum. "Continue."

"—and irrelevant—"

Dream snorted. "Debatable."

"—and—and weak," he finished, much too self-satisfied with his tirade.

"Bravo, George," Dream commended him, without an ounce of spirit, more amused than anything else at the insults flung in his direction.

"Shut your mouth," George said, face losing some of its redness.

"It's okay, George," he said, moving in closer to the case where he kept the dumbbells, next to George's feet. George looked up at his body, towering above him, and Dream knelt to slot the equipment back in their home. Without looking for his reaction, Dream admitted, because he had never learned when to shut up, "I like to look at you, too."

"Oh, I know," George said, tone so low it was surely just for the two of them to hear.

His skin prickled with heat. Dream had to admit; this was weird, the way they were speaking to each other. It wasn't *unusual*, out of the ordinary, but it was weird. The thickness of their tension was indisputable, undeniable, hot and unrelenting, and Dream felt like he was being consumed by the heat in the air.

These actions were not up for public consumption; the alarming awareness of this fact made the

need to crawl out of his own flesh all-too pressing. Flirting was easy when it was done in a crowd, because it could be written off as for fans, anyone besides themselves. Here, there was no one to listen to their words other than each other.

In this room, they were not performers. They were just people.

Two people who were making the choice to say questionably flirtatious things to one another. To look at each other, without looking away. To act like this without excuse. Without reason. Without guilt.

George licked his lips again. Dream chose not to glance down, and sat on the ground, suddenly unsteady, suddenly feeling like he was done.

“Tired?” George rasped, looking at him.

Dream nodded, resting his head against a raised knee. “Very.”

“You’re all sweaty,” George spoke again, but he didn’t state it like it was bad. He said it like—

God, Dream’s head hurt. He closed his eyes, collecting himself. “I—I should go shower, I think.”

He heard George swallow, couldn’t look at him anymore, afraid of what he’d do if he did. “Kay. Dinner soon?”

“Yeah,” Dream agreed, and when he left the room in the subsequent seconds, it felt like avoidance.

Week three brought the remainder of George’s belongings, the last pieces of his life in London which they’d all been waiting to be shipped, the final puzzle piece that fit George into his new life in Florida to completion.

Belongings including, but not limited to: a few boxes of things that he’d never bothered to move from his childhood home to his apartment, boxes with old video games, clothes that still technically fit him and would be good for warm weather, a couple certificates and books, and a bonus package from his mother filled with his favourite sweets, a touching offering that Dream could tell meant a lot to George when he opened it.

After it arrived, Dream helped George pack the rest away, cleared up the stuff that was lying uselessly around George’s room that he’d never moved despite emptying its contents, like the carry-on shoved in his closet and some boxes that had yet to be broken down.

George was at a different level in terms of organization, compared to Dream and Sapnap. He wasn’t a slob, necessarily, but he was frazzled. Lazy. Uncaring about keeping things in specific places. Sapnap liked his personal space clean, cleaner than Dream, actually, which had come as a surprise to them all. Dream lived in his own personal brand of organization; it didn’t make sense, sometimes, and when his stress levels were particularly bad the messiness became worse, but he definitely liked his things in specific places, whereas George just liked to keep his things... truthfully, anywhere they could be easily found.

An artifact there, a hoodie here, his vlog camera showed up in the kitchen, then the office, then somehow ended up on Dream’s bedside table, though he didn’t know why. Then again, a lot of George’s things found their way into Dream’s bedroom. He’d found George’s dirty socks in his

own laundry, a few days prior, and his pink hoodie laid slung over the back of a stool beside Dream's bed.

Everything was intertwined, now. Dream could bet some of his stuff might be in George's room. He didn't know what, but he was sure of it.

He didn't want to do any of the untwining. Every part of them was tangled in each other: their legs, on the couch, their clothes, in the laundry, their items, in the house. He loved it.

It was fine as long as George wasn't being a total mess. Dream didn't quite care that deeply about it. Plus, they kept their shared areas clean, and Dream's mom came over to help with the cleaning often enough that it never got bad. For three men in their twenties, they were doing alright.

Their YouTube content, however, had come to a bit of a standstill. They'd done a couple of streams, posted some initial vlogs, and a lot of photos, but they hadn't exactly made time to go back to their standard Minecraft content. It had been a month since Dream's last upload, and although he'd fully prepared to take a break to enjoy George moving in, he needed to get back into it.

A Dream Team video was the best choice to return, so the three of them came up with a fun throwback-style concept to record, and they set aside time later in the week to do it.

The issue was that their sleep schedules, while now in sync, were utterly *fucked*. The night before, they'd stayed up enjoying each other's company, blasting music, falling over themselves in giggles, and Sapnap and George had each had a couple beers. Dream had gone to bed not even realizing that the day before, he'd only slept a handful of hours, and was dead asleep once he hit the mattress.

He woke up the next morning, disoriented beyond expression—not to phone notifications, or an alarm, but to Patches pushing at his face with her head, snout pressed into his chin.

"Baby, stop it," he mumbled at her, voice incomprehensible, but her paw came to nudge his nose afterward, not giving up. "Ugh, *Patches*, c'mon."

A tiny meow followed, but she let him be and jumped away. He patted his bed, aimlessly looking for his phone, knowing he would not be able to go back to sleep.

yo we still recording? the text from Sapnap read, from an hour ago, which was already half an hour past when they'd scheduled to do it. Nothing from George, and Dream briefly wondered if he was even awake. A couple calendar notifications. He'd slept for ten hours.

Uggggghhhhhh, he whined, hauling himself out of bed with bleary eyes, not even fully open yet. He didn't bother to put on a shirt or brushing his teeth before leaving his room, clad in some festive pyjamas that his sister had gifted to him at one point, and beelined to Sapnap's room.

"Nick?" he said, cotton-mouthed, after knocking on the door a few times, then opened it after Sapnap had shouted to come in. He rubbed at his eyes, turning the knob. "Dude, I forgot we had plans."

"We figured," came George's voice, which took Dream by surprise. So, they were *both* awake, and George was lying diagonally on Sapnap's bed, phone held high above his face, head at the foot of the mattress. Sapnap was sat up, back against the headboard, also on his phone.

"Oh," Dream croaked, and George took that moment to look up at him.

“Still tired?” George asked, amusedly taking him in, but his eyes strayed downwards over his torso, and Dream suddenly remembered his choice to forgo a shirt. He’d been around them both half-naked a few times, they’d taken a few chances to sit in the pool in Dream’s backyard, but whenever George looked at Dream, he did it entirely and without shame. He looked at him long and hard and didn’t hide the fact that he was doing so. It always left Dream feeling ten different shades of exposed.

“I’m exhausted,” Dream admitted, and George sat upwards in bed, still watching him. Dream controlled himself, hoping he wasn’t blushing. Sometimes he did that with his entire body, and that would’ve been noticeable and embarrassing if it happened in front of the three of them.

“We ordered breakfast,” Sapnap told him, looking refreshed for someone who’d been quite tipsy the night before. “For all of us.”

“It’s two P.M.,” Dream pointed out, weakly, pointlessly, running a hand through his hair, attempting to tame it. He hadn’t even looked at himself before he left his room and he was regretting it.

Sapnap shrugged, uncaring. “And they’re still open, so.”

“We can still record,” George added, knowing Dream liked to get shit done when they had plans scheduled. He threw his legs off the side of the bed, turned toward Dream to address him. “Maybe in an hour instead? After we eat.”

Dream let out a relieved breath. “Okay, yeah, I can work with that.”

“I am *starving*,” Sapnap droned. “What was the word you used, George?”

“Ravenous,” George said, which was such a George choice of word; Dream was endeared. George got off the bed, patting down the wrinkles in his sweatpants for no reason. “Hey, Nick, pass my phone?”

It was such a simple detail, with no prelude, but Dream was taken aback by it happening.

Nick.

George hadn’t called Sapnap that in so long, in *years*, actually; he used to a while ago from time to time, but he’d grown used to calling him Sapnap in recent years, even doing so in private. It threw Dream through a loop, hearing it again after all this time.

It didn’t seem that unusual to Sapnap and George, though; neither of them looked like it was out of the ordinary at all, making no face at the name. Was it something that happened commonly? Dream had been around them so much but he hadn’t heard it leave George’s mouth once, though he knew they spent a lot of time together just the two of them as well.

“Where is it?” Sapnap asked, looking between the sheets of his bed with a confused face. “You literally just had it.”

“I don’t know,” George complained, “your stupid bed ate it.”

Sapnap shot George a dirty look. “Your stupid ass lost it.” He peeled the duvet to the side before finding it, immediately throwing it at George without warning.

George screamed, much too loudly, and caught it. “Holy *shit*, my reflexes are amazing! I’m the best.”

Sapnap laughed at him, saying nothing, and went back to his phone. George pocketed his phone and turned back to Dream, who was still at the door watching them interact with investment.

“Good morning to you,” George said in greeting, before walking up before him, like they hadn’t already had an entire conversation. And then he reached his hand up to touch Dream’s cheek, without explanation. Dream held his breath, and George’s index finger drew a line across his jaw.

Finding his voice, he tried to speak in his usual tone. “What?”

“You’re all scruffy,” George commented, very, very quietly. Dream’s eyes flickered to Sapnap, but he wasn’t even paying attention to them, in the middle of typing something furiously on his phone.

Dream swallowed, looking back at George, who was looking up at him, all well-rested and effortlessly good-looking. “I—uh. Gotta shave. This morning. I’ll—” he stepped away, backed off from George, putting space between them. His brain felt sluggish from his waking disorientation and the unexpected touch. “Um. I’ll go do that... now.”

He left as quickly as possible, not looking at George, moved straight to his bathroom and took a moment to breathe in. *Jesus*, he thought, splashing his face with cold water, and attempted to gather his bearings for his morning routine.

In the middle of brushing his teeth, there came knocking at his door.

“Yesh?” he slurred, gargling around his toothbrush. He was basically done, so he spat and cleaned his mouth with water before opening the door. George, once again, with a bright smile on his face.

“Hello,” George said, as if they hadn’t spoken five minutes prior.

“What d’you want?” Dream asked, leaving the door open and moving back in front of the mirror.

“Sapnap kicked me out.” George walked in and hopped onto the countertop to take a seat, in a spot right next to the sink. Dream had never had someone sit on another person’s bathroom counter so casually before, but George looked like he was meant to be there.

Dream opened his drawers, looking for his shaving equipment. “So, you came to bother me?”

“Exactly,” George answered, and when Dream looked at him, he shot him a toothy smile. “What’re you doing?”

“Mm, shaving now,” he answered, absentmindedly, before he began applying a bit of shaving cream. He started off with his usual upward strokes, right below his jawline. George went quiet, watched with strange interest. Dream wondered, briefly, if he shaved in the same way, wondered if George would let him watch him too, one day. He hadn’t done this sort of thing in front of another person in a long time; he’d done it around previous partners, but never a friend. Not even family, at least not since his early teenage years.

He didn’t mind doing it in front of George. George was different. Everything was different with George; he made every exception under the sun for him.

Mostly through, George spoke up again. “Could I help?”

Dream’s hand went still, trying hard not to cut himself from the surprise he felt coursing through his body from the question.

“Help, how?” Dream asked, voice fragile, already feeling too tense.

George opened his palm in waiting, without explaining anything further. After a beat, Dream dropped the razor into it, relinquishing control.

“C’mere,” George cooed, pulling at his arm eagerly like Dream was some kind of scared puppy, and it made him laugh, shoulders going lax and losing most of their tension. “Lift your chin, turn toward me. Look to the side.”

Dream followed the instructions with obedience, letting George do his thing. He only had a bit left, and for some reason, he trusted George a lot with taking care of his face. George could be gentle when he needed to be. George *was* gentle with him, when he wanted to be, which was more often than he’d expected.

The razor swiped across his face a couple times, along his cheek, then some spots over his throat where there was random hair growth. He preferred himself clean-shaven, compared to George and Sapnap who liked some hair on their faces, and George followed that unspoken request dutifully.

“I like your teeth,” George said randomly, and nothing could’ve prepared Dream for that compliment.

“I—thank you?” Dream floundered, so surprised because he hadn’t even been showing them, but he tried to keep still. “No one has ever complimented my teeth before.”

“They’re cute,” he said, and when Dream glanced at him, George was—he was looking at his mouth, oh, God, of course he was, that’s why he’d said it.

Dream went silent again, unsure of how to respond further.

They lingered in tenser silence than before, and what had happened earlier nagged at Dream’s mind. He lacked self-control. He needed to ask about it, talk about it. He needed... something.

“You can call me Clay, you know,” Dream uttered, a subject shift with no preliminary introduction, not moving his jaw much as he spoke, not wanting George to nick him. “If you’d like.”

George paused his motions for a second, then continued as if Dream hadn’t spoken. “Can I, now?” he asked, as if Dream offering this to him was an unsurprising turn of events.

Dream’s eyes flickered back, and he saw George focused on the task at hand, not looking near his eyes at all. And he said, trying to sound as unassuming as possible, “I heard you call Sapnap ‘Nick’.”

He saw George’s lip twitch, but the smile was quickly tampered. “I did,” he confirmed, then stopped his job to peer at Dream. “Are you jealous?”

“Am I—” Dream started, standing straighter in surprise, spine going taut. “I—no.”

“No?” George teased, smiling, before he returned to finishing his task.

Dream swallowed. And went, a complete lie: “No.”

“Hm,” George dragged out, a pensive sound, and must’ve realized that there was underlying importance to this conversation. “You’ve just... always been ‘Dream’ to me.” Some swipes of the razor to his neck, making Dream shiver from the sensation. Then, enunciating each word in the sentence, he said: “You are Dream.”

It’s just a name, Dream reminded himself, because it was. And it was a huge part of him, as well.

"I am Dream," he agreed, smiling back a little, with a gentle tone, not moving too much.

"That's my name for you," George said, with the softest smile at his lips, and he put the razor down. "But maybe you can be Clay sometimes, too."

"Maybe," Dream said, heart soaring, not sure why he liked the idea of that so much. Perhaps he could be both, to George. He liked that George wanted him to be both, that he saw both sides.

"I noticed Sap prefers Nick here," George explained, which was true, because Sapnap did prefer that at home, "but I got so used to calling him Sapnap. Still, it slipped out. Doesn't happen often."

"You don't, um—you don't have to explain yourself to me," Dream tried, trying to sound more casual about it now. George was washing the razor, clearing it of the gooey shaving cream stuck to it, the fine blond hairs. "I know you and Sapnap are different from you and I."

"Oh, we are a *lot* different," George told him, as if he wanted to laugh about this fact. "Still. Wanted you to know." He shrugged, easy-going. Then handed Dream a face towel and the aftershave balm. "All done."

Dream hummed. "Thank you," he responded, though he wasn't sure which part of the moment he was thanking him for, and George hopped off the counter, left the room without a goodbye, as if he hadn't shaken Dream to his core mere minutes after he'd begun his day.

Intimacy evolved in shifts, Dream came to realize.

During the course of his friendship with George, he'd believed intimacy to be low voices, honest confessions, late-night calls, compliments slipped out. Times that George undoubtedly chose him over his other friends, a selfie sent with a mischievous look, texts reading *i miss you* and *could you call later* and *talk to me i'm bored*, and—don't get him wrong—he *loved* all of that. He held all of those close to him, he treasured them dearly because it was what he'd grown used to and what he liked to think of when he needed the reminder that George loved him. The proof of it laid there, in those exchanges, the pieces of George which wedged their way beneath Dream's skin and remained in him always. When he thought of intimacy, he thought of this.

But that wasn't all there was to them, he had grown to notice. He and George were so much more than that. He hadn't accounted for how they'd change, how much he'd cherish the unavoidable progression of their relationship. Because they felt the same, of course they felt the same as before, it was him and George and the two of them meeting and living together would not change how Dream *felt* about him—but it did make everything he felt more obvious. More undeniable.

All those instances where Dream had said that they wouldn't be different after meeting had ended up being lies. They *were* different. They were lingering looks, suffocating tension, flimsy excuses to touch. They were entire bodies pressed against each other on the couch, they were poking each other in ticklish spots, hands over mouths to force the other quiet during the dumbest arguments, and George licking at Dream's palm with playful misbehaviour, only for Dream to shout back, *ew, George, you are so fucking gross!* They were avoiding sleep to stay up together, playing chess for hours at a time. They were looking, watching, staring, burning gazes and dilated pupils and fluttering eyelashes.

They were so much. Too much. Much more than anticipated. In the most fascinating ways.

Growing up, Dream had been told the kitchen was the heart of a home, that if he were to buy a house, to make sure that it had a nice kitchen. When he'd been looking to become a homeowner at the age of twenty, he'd asked his parents for a lot of advice on his options, and his mother, his favourite person, had told him one thing: *make sure the kitchen is beautiful, and you will be happy*. That there was a lot of counter space, a nice island perhaps. That the appliances were updated. That there was potential for any upgrades, if needed, potential to be modernized in the coming years.

Dream had taken this advice seriously.

He bought a big home, and his two personal requirements ended up being the following: an open backyard, with a pool and a hot tub, and the most attractive kitchen possible.

Now, just because he had a nice kitchen, didn't mean he cooked in it often. He knew his way around the kitchen, sure, and he could cook if he needed to make meals—eggs when he woke up, the occasional fancy dinner, fast meals like tacos—but he was not a common user of his stove, nor his oven. His mom came over during the week a few times to help him out, mass prepping meals for a few days if she knew they'd be busy. Out of everyone who entered their home, the frequenters of the kitchen went in this exact order: his mom, him, and George and Sapnap tied, despite the fact that George was better at cooking than Sapnap. And Dream was better at both of them at cooking, if he did say so himself, even if he didn't do it that much.

Imagine his surprise, then, when he walked in his kitchen on a Wednesday evening, and George was there in the middle of cooking a meal, a frustrated expression on his face.

"You're cooking?" Dream asked, with surprise, leaning against the island, and George jumped—his back had been to Dream when he'd entered—and turned.

"Hi," George said, out of breath, as if he'd been running a marathon. "I'm—yes. I know you and Sapnap were doing that podcast thing, and your mum—she stopped by earlier! And said she'd be busy tonight. So, I decided to make some pasta for us."

His mother had met George the first week he'd arrived, but Dream couldn't imagine them speaking to each other one-on-one, without him there, for some reason. He wanted to ask questions about this development, but George seemed distracted by his preparations.

"Oh?" Dream said, softly. This was all so considerate of George. But also: "You spoke to her?"

George relaxed at the question, smiled. "She was really nice, wanted to drop stuff off for you." He pointed at the kitchen table, where there were now some envelopes and a small box; things like these were why he'd given his mother a key, he trusted her not to infringe on his privacy, and she only came over when it was necessary.

"Oh, okay." He peered at George, curious about the food. "What kind of pasta?"

"Um, it's some shrimp-feta-tomato thing," George told him, going back to chopping at garlic. "I saw it on TikTok."

Dream snorted. "Of course you did." He moved near the sink, looking at the tomatoes George had laid out beside it. "Want me to help?"

"I was meant to do this on my own," George said, with a wry undertone of embarrassment. "It was

a surprise, idiot.”

He reached a hand up to ruffle George’s hair, and it went unruly and askew before falling somewhat back into place, the strands soft between his fingers. With a sweet tone, he said, “Nice of you.”

“Shut up,” George mumbled, because even when he did nice gestures, he had to be a brat about it. He nodded toward the tomatoes. “You can wash those, if you want. I’ll chop them.”

A bit of an easy task, but Dream wanted to see him at work, so he did what was asked. As he got rid of the dirt and peeled off the fruit stickers, George got the oven ready, clearing it for the baking dish.

“Your mum said you talk about me a lot,” George said when he was done, not looking at him, as he pulled out some of the spices from the cupboard.

Dream paused at the comment, placing the last tomato on the chopping board. “Of course I do. I talk to her about everything.”

“Hm,” was all George replied with, picking up the knife again to cut them all up.

Dream thought back to everything he’d ever told his mother about George, wondering what they would have spoken about. An ounce of fear passed through him, for a split-second. “Was it... weird?” Sometimes his mom overstepped boundaries, and George was kind of private. He hoped she hadn’t pushed him into talking about something he didn’t want to.

George looked at him, then, shook his head with reassurance. “No, not at all,” he said. “I hadn’t expected her to bring it up. She’s... a lot like you.” A small smile formed, at the corner of his mouth.

Dream thought about this; he’d been told this before, but never by a friend. People were prone to pointing out how similar he and his sister were, rather than him and his mom. “How so?”

George didn’t look at him when he said, voice soft, “She’s kind.”

He exhaled, shakily. It meant so much that George liked her, that he thought this of them both.

“And friendly,” George continued, and Dream’s heart was stuttering, listening to this, he needed a second. “She asked after my mum, too. Wanted her phone number to have a chat.”

“She did that with Nick, too,” Dream explained, quickly, hoping George didn’t find that weird. “Said something about wanting to keep in touch, needing it for emergencies.”

“I know,” George said, eyes crinkling as he answered. “She explained. It was sweet of her.”

Dream swallowed, relieved. “Yeah, she’s pretty great.”

George nodded, moving forward. “Could you get the cheese? In the fridge. Couldn’t find it before.”

“We definitely have some, we only used it for salad last week,” Dream replied, moving to the fridge. “Dude, you’d never guess what Sapnap told me after the podcast.”

George didn’t respond. Instead, Dream heard a sharp inhale, followed by a high-pitched noise.

“George?” Dream said at the sound, still pushing aside packed containers, looking for the container

of feta he'd purchased some grocery trips ago. "What is it? Forget something?"

"Um," George said like he didn't want to speak up, but there was a smidge of panic in his voice. Dream turned quickly, with sudden deep-rooted fear in his gut. "I cut myself."

"*What?*" Dream moved so fast to George's side that he almost tripped over his own feet. "Holy shit, you're bleeding." It was going everywhere. They'd need to wash the tomatoes again. Briefly, he wondered if blood would stain the chopping board.

"It's not that bad," George tried to say, and Dream grabbed hold of his hand, where there was a clear slice over the tip of his index finger, gushing blood.

"Shit," Dream uttered, moving them in unison so he could move the hand under a running faucet, switching the water lukewarm. "Okay, it's not that deep of a cut, you'll be fine." He exhaled slowly, with relief that they wouldn't need to go to the E.R., that no stitches would be needed. "Dude, you *need* to be more careful."

"I was," George protested, with a weak voice. Dream gave him a disbelieving look, turning off the faucet after a minute. "Okay, maybe not that well, but—"

"How are you bleeding this much?" Dream asked, watching as blood pooled at the tip of his finger. It had lessened a lot, at least, but it was still somewhat there. "Shit, I need to get you a bandaid. Where are the fucking paper towels? Put your finger in your mouth or something."

"Ew," George said, with disgust, "I'm not some vampire—"

"You're such a baby," Dream shot back, "do it while I look for—"

George's eyebrows pinched together with annoyance. "Why would I—?"

Dream's frustration was mounting, and they started speaking over each other with progressive insistence. "Oh, come *on*, George, just—"

"—that's gross, no, you weirdo—"

"—oh, my God, *fine*, let me—"

It happened so fast that there was no thought process proceeding it. Time stood still as Dream tightened his hold on George's hand, and he did something that he wouldn't have dared to think he ever would, not in a million years. He licked at George's hand, and wrapped his mouth around the finger himself, and it rested between his lips.

Oh, God, Dream thought, *oh, no, oh, fuck*.

George's finger was in his mouth, pressed against the flat of his tongue.

Dream couldn't breathe. He couldn't move. He couldn't think.

And George went quieter than he'd ever been before, looking Dream with pitch-black eyes, pupils blown-out and his breathing uneven. It took so much to shut him up on any day—and to think they'd been arguing, loudly, seconds before. But George didn't pull away, didn't make a move at all; in fact, he relaxed under Dream's touch, the muscles in his arm going loose. Dream could taste the copper tones from George's blood on his taste buds, the salt of his skin, could feel the line of the slice along the fingertip.

There was no valid explanation for him choosing to do this, but the truth was that he hadn't used his head. He'd been impulsive, lost in the heat of the moment. In the seconds leading up to it, he had barely been thinking. All that had overcome him in the past minute was panic, the urge to protect, the instinct to take care of George the best way he knew how.

He really liked George, he was realizing. He wanted him so much it fucking hurt sometimes. He wanted him so much it made him make the most bizarre, deranged choices.

"What," George began, breathless from it, voice cracking around the word, staring in utter shock, "is wrong with you."

Dream pulled back in an instant.

"Sorry," he rushed out, and George's breath quickened between them. He wondered if George could hear his own heartbeat in his ears, the blood rushing through his veins, the same way Dream could hear his. "That was so—"

—weird, unsanitary, fucked up, unnecessary, out of line, he knew that—

He'd seen the fucking line and tripped over it, on pure accident.

It had been bound to happen eventually.

"It's fine," George said instead, voice low and eyes glassy. "I'm," he swallowed, eyes flickering downwards at Dream's mouth, "good."

Oh. George was—George wanted—oh. Oh, shit.

Fuck. He couldn't even look at him.

"Oh," Dream breathed, eyes unable to leave George's, dumb from the recognition of what he felt inside reflected back at him, terrifyingly inescapable. George was—no, *nononono*, how could Dream handle knowing this? Instead he said, as if he wasn't having a meltdown: "I'm glad."

George blinked. "Okay." A pause, to look at his hand. "I... think I stopped bleeding."

Dream's gaze dropped, back to his finger. There was still a pool of blood, but it had let up, had slowed in indication that there wasn't more to give, and dried over as they'd been speaking. At least not everything was a mess.

"Bandaid," Dream whispered, without sense. "Let me get one."

He tried to remember how to move his limbs, and it came easier now opening the drawer that held the First Aid kit, now that he had reason and direction. Careful and gentle in his movements, he opened the package and wrapped the bandage around George's finger.

"Thank you," George said, hoarse. He cleared his throat. "I should... finish. Dinner. Yeah." George nodded to himself, stepping away, but he didn't look mad at all, he didn't look uncomfortable, he didn't even seem that unsettled. He seemed fine, a lot better than Dream did.

"Yes," Dream agreed, nodding, "you need to finish, right, I'll—uh, go tell Nick what's up."

He left the room in a flash, as if he'd never even entered.

Dream stood outside of Sapnap's door, contemplating his own actions, staring, and decided to hide in his bedroom instead. Texted Sapnap, *george is cooking. check on him in a few?* And shut out the

universe until dinnertime.

Jesus Christ, what the fuck was wrong with him? Why was he so *impulsive*, sometimes?

He had tasted George's blood. The sweet and salty undertones of it. The sting of bitterness. In any other situation, he'd be spiralling over what a complete freak he'd been, doing that, but what scared him even more than what he'd done was the look in George's eyes when he'd done it. He hadn't even bothered teasing Dream for being ridiculous. He hadn't laughed, hadn't smiled.

George had looked at him with want in his eyes.

The taste of his finger against his tongue would haunt Dream. It would give him nightmares. It would give him the most blissful, heart-stopping dreams. He wanted to melt into the floor. He couldn't forget. He didn't want to forget. He wanted to remember.

The way he and George acted with each other—he knew that they were an odd pair, that they did things with each other that friends didn't do with each other, but this was the most potentially boundary-crossing exchange to date. It was *weird*. There was no other word to describe it other than weird. That word echoed in his mind as he reflected on what had happened.

Sometimes, he wondered if they'd go too far. If they'd push whatever this was between them to a limit, to each other's breaking point. But then something like this happened, and Dream began to realize that he didn't have a personal limit, when it came to George. He didn't have a line. He didn't have boundaries. He'd let him have whatever he wanted, he'd let him take, take, take. He wanted to give George whatever he wanted. He wanted to offer everything he had.

Dream would wonder if he pushed things too far, but the proof, the answers, shone in George's eyes. It hadn't been too far. It had been far enough. The perfect amount, even.

George felt—

He was—

Dream collected himself.

George *wanted* him. George wanted him, too, didn't he? He wanted him *back*. It was undeniable, now. Running from it was pointless.

Realizing this was worse than realizing he wanted George to begin with. It was terrifying, and incredible, and addicting. Reciprocation of any kind wasn't what he had expected in the slightest, from wanting George. But he'd gotten it, anyway.

He didn't know how to deal with that. He sat on his bedroom floor, forehead pressed hard against his knees, waiting for someone to come get him, thinking about his choices, thinking about what it meant for something to be *inevitable*. He didn't think he'd known what that felt like, not until now.

This was how they'd deal with it, and Dream knew it from experience, because they'd done it a million times before, were used to this song-and-dance:

They'd pretend it never happened. They'd pretend it was normal. They'd pretend they hadn't seen the reflection of their own desires in each other's eyes.

They'd pretend.

It was getting harder and harder to pretend. But they'd do it some more, and they were so practiced

at it, they'd do it a little too well.

Bad habits were difficult to kick. Dream's mental well-being had skyrocketed since everything had changed, and he was grateful for that, especially to his friends who had heavy responsibility in helping with it, but his worst habit still had to be overworking himself.

Workaholic tendencies didn't disappear overnight, especially since he tended to rely on productivity to feel good about himself. He hated to admit it, but even though he wasn't *always* caught up in numbers and statistics, he was the type of person that paid close attention to them. To keep track, to recognize when he'd dropped the ball on a video, when he needed to improve, and also when he did well, so he could recognize what worked.

Even more incessant than the need to pay attention to analytics was the voice inside his head that poked at him, telling him to help others when they needed it. Dream knew he wasn't some messiah of the YouTube or Minecraft communities, but he did feel a strong obligation to help those around him. He liked to help. He wanted to help when they asked for it.

He *liked* giving back. But he overcomplicated it. Overbooked himself. Did too much, and went through burn-out periods. It was a vicious, never-ending cycle, one that he'd been caught in a few times since his channel blew up. It didn't happen often, but it remained a pattern he fell into, from time to time.

One of those periods was creeping up on him. He could feel it coming. That morning, he'd been in a call for hours, despite it being a Sunday. It was nearing afternoon, still ongoing, and he was at his limit.

Breakfast that morning had been an entire ordeal; they'd all awakened early, and Dream had decided to make waffles for the three of them, decked out in syrup and fruit and whipped cream, though he'd passed on the last topping. George had suggested making parts of a 'full English breakfast', whatever that was. They'd only made the beans, sausages, and eggs—which had ended up being, uh, questionably made, if he was truthful, but decent enough. He hadn't consumed so many calories in one go before nine in the morning in years, but George had given him sad, wide eyes, and Dream was not so strong of a man that he could resist that directed at him.

When he'd left them, citing a call with his manager, he hadn't expected it to take so long.

His calendar was open on his second monitor, crowded with meetings for the first time in a while. He was trying to figure out which days he had free to fit in a couple other commitments during the next few weeks.

And he was getting stressed out simply looking at it, but he didn't like dwelling on stress when he felt it. Pushing past it without thinking too hard about it made his worries more manageable.

Patches sat by his feet, tail curled around one of his ankles, her head resting on a tendon. She was asleep, had been awake and kicking around his room, playing with toys, until thirty minutes ago. He tried not to move too much, not wishing to wake her. Her presence always helped in situations like these, even if it was only mildly.

Past twelve, George entered his room without knocking, a curious expression on his face.

Dream inclined his head toward him in acknowledgement, went back to listening to his call without

speaking. George splayed out on his bed, he noticed, when he turned to look at what he was doing. He wasn't even on his phone; he was just lying on Dream's bed, head turned toward him, listening as he spoke to his agency. The little eavesdropper. He didn't mind, so he let George do his thing, and kept the call going for another twenty minutes.

Half-twelve came and George started making a ruckus. First, Dream heard him moving, walking up behind Dream's gaming chair, and he felt the looming presence of a body behind him, the shadow of him flickering over his screen.

Dream tilted his head backwards to look up, met George's eyes, who smiled and raised a hand to Dream's head. His fingers carded through the strands of Dream's hair, still not saying anything. Dream sighed from the relaxing sensation, let George do what he wanted, enjoying the feeling of being played with.

Still trying to listen to the conversation of the call, George's nails began scratching against his scalp. Dream was losing focus. He raised his hands over his head, pushed George's hands away and turned to give him a pointed glance, before he mouthed, silently, "Stop."

"Mute," George mouthed back at him, now trailing a hand over the back of Dream's head where his hair was much shorter, but he refused to listen, shook his head so George would know to stop touching him. The motions were *distracting* him, and he wanted to get this done.

George took two steps to lean against the desk with his hip, watching Dream with a hard expression.

"What?" Dream mouthed again, confused by the look directed at him.

George glared, poking Dream's cheek with his index finger, insistent, over and over despite Dream trying to catch his fingers or knock his hand aside, until Dream finally gave up and said in the call—"Uh, I've gotta go. Could we talk another time?"

His agency had relayed basically all the information already, so they let him go with ease, exchanging quick goodbyes.

"*What?*" Dream asked George out loud, after the call ended. A smidge of annoyance crept into his tone. "That was important."

"Chill," George said, soothingly first, resting his hand on Dream's shoulder until it relaxed under his touch.

Honestly, Dream wasn't that bothered by George's antics. He had just been himself, the way they both always were with each other when one of them wanted attention and the other was busy with work. Dream was stressed, but he didn't want to take it out on George, so he inhaled, exhaled, and let the anxiety leave his body bit by bit.

George's hand tightened on his shoulder. "You were gone for so long, I was waiting for you to come back."

"Sorry," Dream uttered, closing his eyes, feeling bad for being snappish. Then, rushed out, trying to explain, "I was—I had to—sorry."

A worried pinch formed between George's eyebrows. "Hey, it's fine," he reassured him, and Dream wondered if he could feel the stress forming tension in Dream's muscles, under his hand. "I was bored, you know how I get when I'm alone."

Dream huffed a laugh, not smiling. “Uh huh.”

“You must be hungry,” George brought up. “It’s lunchtime. I already ate with Sapnap, he left to see Punz.”

“Um,” Dream began, thinking about it, and that was true—he hadn’t realized how hungry he’d gotten. He nodded. “Sure, I can eat. In a little, though, I need to just”—he clicked on an already-open Excel sheet, which had a list of events inputted—“finish looking at this, first.”

George dropped his hand, still leaning against the desk, watching as he finished up.

Two minutes passed, and it was silent between them, but Dream kept glancing at George every now and then, and he was watching him. Observant. His gaze was heavy; it was irritating, even if he wasn’t voicing anything he was thinking out loud.

“What?” Dream muttered, after it started to become bothersome.

George made a sound in his throat. “You’re stressed,” he noted, like he was stating a fact, not making an assumption. George could tell.

“I’m—” Dream began to repeat, then stopped and lied: “No, I’m fine.”

“Dream,” George sounded out, long, like he did not believe him. “I know you, stop that.”

Dream pushed his chair back from his desk with his feet, turned it toward George, who was facing him. “Sorry, I just. Yeah, a little.”

“I was listening to you talk,” George admitted, which wasn’t an issue to Dream, really; if it was, he would’ve told George to leave during the call. “I saw your calendar, too.”

Dream pursed his lips. “Okay?” He didn’t like where this conversation was heading.

George sighed, tiredly. “You know you can’t be perfect all the time, right?” he asked, giving Dream a knowing look. “You can’t do everything.”

“Speak for yourself,” Dream joked, trying to lessen the gravity of the mood, the concern in George’s eyes.

George didn’t let up, still watching him without the lightheartedness he usually had. “I’m serious, Dream.”

Listening to how George was speaking to him, Dream could recognize that. George didn’t always have these kinds of conversations with him. He wasn’t one to *intervene*. Dream wondered if it worried him more, seeing how he got now that they were together in person, and he could observe his anxiety before his eyes. Before, when he chose to bury himself in work, he’d simply tell George he was busy. Ghost him for some hours, or a whole day, only to receive complaints later on.

Dream didn’t like to cry about his problems. He liked to suffer in silence, then fix them.

“I just,” Dream tried to explain, “really need to get this big project done.”

“I know that, silly,” George said, with understanding, because they’d been talking about it between themselves a lot the past week, but then he continued, “so why are you booking all that other stuff, then?”

“I—” Dream started. Stopped.

He didn't really have an answer for that one.

"I don't know," he settled on, "they asked me, I couldn't say no."

"Dream," George sighed. His thumb rubbed at Dream's shoulder, and he moved closer to him, the warmth of him heating Dream, too. "You physically *cannot* do everything."

Sensibly, Dream understood that sentiment, but it was so hard for him to say no when people asked him for things.

"You could literally do it next month, if you wanted to."

"I know that," Dream said, weakly. "I just—"

"Quiet," George cut in, and Dream shut up. If it were anyone else, he would've argued further. "You can talk to them later, ask about it."

"Ask about what?"

George gave him raised eyebrows. "Ask them to do it next month, instead." He pulled Dream's chair closer to him, hands going back to Dream's hair, pushing strands off his forehead. He liked the touch, melting under it, focusing on it instead of his own overthinking. Gently, George added, because he had a sixth sense for what went on in his brain: "They won't be disappointed, I promise."

Was it that easy to read him? Maybe it was, for George. "I feel bad," Dream lamented.

"Don't," George said, and a smile snuck its way onto his face. "You can tell them I want you to myself."

Dream rolled his eyes. "I can't use a DNF joke to get out of a commitment."

"Why not?" he replied, arching an eyebrow. "We've done it before."

"With *friends*," Dream pointed out, laughing at George, feeling better now that they were joking about this.

"Also," George went on, "it's not a joke. I really do want you to myself." The smile on his face bloomed bigger, as did the affection in Dream's chest.

"Idiot," Dream said softly, and George's hand swooped lower to pinch at Dream's ear.

"You wanna watch *Better Call Saul* with me after you eat?"

They'd been spending time rewatching the most recent seasons in preparation for one that was coming out soon, so Dream nodded easily, glad George suggested something that would take his mind off everything. Maybe he could sneak a cuddle on the couch, when he worked up the courage.

"Sure." George always made things better, helped him to not think about the hard things. "Um. Thank you for checking on me," Dream said, though how he would've preferred to articulate it as rather, *thank you for taking care of me*.

George brushed knuckles under Dream's chin, knocking it lightly. "Of course," he said, then admitted: "I worry about you, sometimes." And it sounded a lot like *I care about you*, which made the words a little sweeter.

Dream swallowed. “You don’t need to worry about me.”

“Yes, I do,” George said, smiling like Dream had just humoured him. “You’re important.”

Those words hurt so well that they burned through his chest.

George sometimes spoke to Dream about his fears, and one of his biggest was his fear of not being able to express himself. But there came times where George spoke to him with such beauty and deliberation that his words could be mistaken as poetry, and Dream cherished it when he got like that. Not everyone got to see George like this. Dream was an exception. Dream was *special*.

Dream did not take it for granted. He recognized his luck, landing George as a friend.

“George...” Dream began, with a slow tone, thinking about all of this.

He looked down at him, adopting a nervous look. “What?” he asked, like he was scared of what Dream would say next.

“George,” he asked, “are you happy?”

George seemed surprised by that question. Dream didn’t blame him. It had just come to him, after that moment, and Dream had taken all but two seconds flat to know that he needed to know the answer immediately.

He pursed his lips. Heard the question, thought about it with the time it deserved. Dream appreciated that, because he hadn’t asked for the hell of it—he needed to know the truth.

After a few contemplative seconds, George nodded, confidently. “I am.”

“You took time to answer that,” came next, not trying to accuse him of lying, only pointing it out.

George looked down, then up again. “I think I wasn’t happy for a while. Before. Being so far from you—from everyone.” His eyes got a faraway, reflective look. “But I’m happy now. Much more than before.”

This wasn’t news to Dream, not at all. He knew all too well how hard it had been for George, being stuck in his home country for years despite wanting to meet his best friends.

“I don’t think I could live with myself if you were unhappy here,” Dream said, hollowly. “I’m—it’s so—it means—so much to me, having you here.” He shook his head, with disbelief. “That you wanted to move in with us. That you were *willing* to move.”

“Of course I wanted to,” George said, and the left corner of his mouth curved upwards. “I always did. I don’t know why that’s always been so hard for you to understand.”

“Just kind of surreal, I guess.” He took George’s hand, held it with care, let George tighten his hold until he squeezed back, twice.

“I want your answer, too,” George said, then, looking at Dream closely. “Are *you* happy?”

Dream paused, and nodded. “I’m... yes, I’m happy, I promise. I feel—the same as you, actually. Wasn’t happy for a while.” He looked at him, with significance, and hoped George would understand how he felt. “But I am, now that I have everything.”

George’s hand squeezed his again. “Everything?”

Dream's heart stopped, and his mind went, *everything, well, no, I don't have*—and he blinked, tried to live in the moment again, but it took half a second to regain his breath.

George was all kind eyes, a patient stance, a gentle understanding that Dream had never known before. His friends were all wonderful, his family was great, but the way in which George touched him, checked on him, took care of him—it felt different. There were feelings there; this, Dream knew. He hadn't yet taken the time to discover the depth of said feelings, but he knew they resided within him, that there was more than wanting, more than lust.

He had also come to recognize that George, likely, wanted him back. Everything Dream felt, that could take an underlying tone of tension, he reciprocated. And George had told him, the first day he'd arrived, that he *meant* it. That he meant all the things he said. He wasn't putting on a show for others to watch. And he wasn't so cruel that he'd fuck with Dream's head this much.

There was something real there. It existed. It lived in them both. It tore him apart, the existence of it.

He felt—uneasy. Unsettled. Unprepared.

Then again, he didn't think many people prepared for feelings like this. Not about anyone.

Evading the exact contents of the question, Dream landed on, "I have everything I need." At least, in that moment of time, he felt it to be true.

"Okay," George accepted, before pulling at Dream's arm, walking backwards until he stood up. "Come, time to eat."

Living with George was filled with countless unexpected surprises.

Most surprising was the way in which Dream still missed him, though.

He preferred George living here with him in their house, tangible and real. Of course he did. But when nightfall came, and they parted ways for sleep, retreating to their respective bedrooms, the longing that he'd grown familiar with while they'd lived apart prodded at him, in memory.

Sometimes he regretted needing to go to sleep.

He missed being able to ask George to watch a show with him, exhausted from lack of sleep, in the guise of wishing to fall asleep on call. The best days had been when they sleep-called on purpose, when they admitted to wanting to be asleep with each other from the get-go. He just sincerely, deeply missed sleeping with George, as odd as it sounded; he missed hearing his breathing even out over the call, he missed the mumbled phrases he'd say on occasion when Dream wasn't sleeping yet, he missed the rare snores when he was deep in it. He missed having that level of intimacy with him, even though they'd achieved other kinds of intimacy the longer they spent time together in person.

Sometimes he wished he didn't have to say goodbye.

It was one in the morning, and Dream was thinking about this as he had his texts with George open. Despite the fact that they were across the house from one another, they'd said goodnight and ended up sending memes to each other anyway, playing iMessage games in between his nightly routine.

He'd taken a shower, and George had sent him a Twitter post. He'd dried his hair, and George had sent him a text. He'd put on his Oklahoma sweatpants, hair damp from a wash, no shirt over his chest, and George had sent him an 8-Ball request.

Sometimes he wondered if they'd ever grow tired of each other—and it never happened.

you are so fucking bad, George had texted last, after winning the last round. He said this, despite the fact that Dream had won three games in a row beforehand.

ONE MORE, Dream said, with deep-seated hatred for losing. Although it wasn't much of a secret, he loved hearing George trash-talk him, even if he was the most infuriating person alive.

George sent another game, so fast he must've already been in the process of doing it. *i'm going to demolish you again, just so you're aware*.

demolish this dick, Dream replied, giggling to himself with perhaps too much self-satisfaction. He attempted to strain his ears for a laugh across their home, but George's bedroom was too far from Dream's for him to hear anything.

you are disgusting., George sent, with the period attached firmly to the end of his sentence.

Dream smiled, reading it. *you like it*, he wrote in between his plays, *don't lie*.

George waited a few minutes, sending his turn back, already in the midst of winning this round by some miracle, along with a text that said, *obviously i like it. doesn't mean ur not gross*.

Dream grinned, revelling in this rare show of admittance from George.

oh, it was obvious was it? he sent, without playing his turn. He was much more concerned with the conversation at hand.

A reply. *stfu and play me back*.

no I think we should discuss this, Dream returned, loving the boost of confidence.

omg ur so annoying, George said. *gonna play with sapnap instead bye*.

A completely baseless threat. Dream expected Sapnap to be asleep by now; they'd all been talking in his room, over an hour ago, before Dream had left to take his shower, and he'd seemed dead tired from hanging outside all day.

Dream completed his turn anyway, and replied with a text saying: *nooooo don't leave me :(*.

clingy bitch, was all George replied, which made Dream cackle when he saw it. Ruthless, and predictably George.

oh fuck off. He took his shot, missed the last ball, and swore loudly. It was going to be easy for George to—

LET'S GOOOOO, George texted back, in victory, and Dream sighed.

you suck, Dream replied, already switching to Twitter, too frustrated to play another game. If there was anything he and George had in common, it was their pettiness.

crybaby, George responded, and Dream deliberately ignored it, scrolling through his timeline.

A few minutes passed, and his phone started buzzing, relentless vibrations filling his notifications.

One. *Dream.*

Two. *Dream.*

Three. *Dream.*

Four. *Dream.*

Dream sighed again, louder, and humoured him, because he knew George wouldn't let up. *omg what.*

i'm bored, George said, and Dream could hear him whining.

ok??? how am I supposed to fix that.

idk :(, George sent. Dream was thinking of a response, a remedy for this problem, considering telling George to simply go to bed, when he texted again, a total topic switch: *can i say something weird?*

It wasn't that out of the ordinary, getting a message like that. Usually the confessions that George considered to be 'weird' ended up being some of the best things Dream heard from him at all. He was intrigued, as always, by the inner workings of George's mind. So, he texted, simply: *sure.*

it's very weird, George said in prelude, like some variation of a warning, before he said: *i kinda miss you.*

Dream blinked at it. Held his breath.

Exhaled, surprised.

What were the odds they'd both been thinking that on the same night?

Then, he wondered: what were the odds they'd both had that same thought, in unison, without the other knowing it, every night to proceed this one?

wdym, he replied, needing a smidge more context, hoping George had been thinking about their old sleep-calls, too.

Time passed, and George settled on a reply saying: *idk.*

Dream could tell that wasn't an honest answer. He was in the middle of contemplating how he could get the truth out of him when he got another message.

come here please?

He choked on his own spit.

What a fruitless battle it would've been for Dream to convince himself to say no. As soon as he saw the word *please*, coming from George, directed at him, he knew he would not be able to deny him.

Locking his phone, he rolled out of bed, drank from the water bottle by his bed, and stretched his legs. He refused to go to George's room without a shirt on, so he searched around his room for something to wear. There was a soft, overworn green tee draped over the back of his desk chair,

and Dream slipped it on before exiting his room. He left his door ajar, in case Patches wanted to enter, to fall asleep in his bed like she sometimes did.

Soft footsteps padded along the hardwood floor on his journey to George's room. Their bedrooms were furthest from one another, though that wasn't what Dream would've requested, if he'd had a choice—it had just ended up that way, when they were planning out who'd take which bedroom. He wasn't wearing socks, but the wood wasn't cold beneath his feet.

His entire body felt warm.

In the nighttime, it felt dangerous, meeting before falling asleep. It wasn't that they hadn't spent time together at night, in the darkness—they'd stayed up playing games, hanging out, talking—but not in secret. Tonight, Dream was trying his hardest to be *silent*. He didn't usually do that when he hung out with George or Sapnap until the dead of dawn. He was loud, to the point that they'd each taken their own turns at cursing each other out for yelling while one of them had been sleeping. It was a problem they commonly shared.

Something told him to keep quiet, for now. Something told him he needed to be.

Outside George's shut door, he stared at it, hand hovering over the doorknob. Contemplating everything he had awareness of.

There was a strange feeling in his chest, a premonition that came to him, nudging at his gut. It was similar to the feeling that came to him when he knew he was making a grave mistake, but this was the opposite to that, he was sure of it. Instead, a voice told him to prepare for what was to come, to let go of everything that was holding him back. To leave all his hang-ups outside this tall piece of wood, separating him from George.

It told him to take a risk.

He could leave now, he told himself. He could return to his room, tell George he was tired, that he needed to sleep. He could text all of this to him. He could get out of this.

Shaking, he opened the door instead, slipped inside as soundlessly as possible.

He knew he wouldn't be leaving until the next morning before he'd even entered.

George's curtains were wide open in the room, the moonlight shining over his bed, brightening the room. There was a lava lamp in the corner, still on, lighting the room in shades of blue, then purple, then red, shifting colours every few seconds. Dream was all-too familiar with the ambiance, having been there many times.

George sat up in bed after the door opened, hair out of place and soft, wearing a white shirt. Dream shut the door behind him, pressing his back along it, watching him. Aching to touch.

In a quiet voice, George said, "You came."

Dream wanted to smile. "Of course I did." *I can't say no to you*, he left unspoken.

Neither of them moved for a long moment, before George patted the spot beside him, scooting over to the left of the bed. "Lay with me."

Danger, Dream's mind whispered again, and he fought against it, moving to do as George requested. *I want this*, he whispered back to his mind, *let me have this*.

George fixed a pillow for Dream to put beneath his head, and as he got settled, he joked, "I better not find crumbs in here."

George gave him an exasperated look, resting on his own pillow, turning his body to his side to face Dream. "You think so lowly of me."

Dream pulled the covers half-over his body, turning to face George as well. He could see him pretty well in the lighting, despite it still being dark; his eyes were adjusting to the room quickly. "I just know you."

"I'll have you know, I switched bedsheets days ago," George told him, huffing at the accusation.

"Congrats on being a responsible adult," Dream laughed, "idiot."

"*Idiot*," George mocked in a deeper voice.

Together, they laid in George's bed, watching each other, letting silence wash over them.

Dream inched a little closer; his knee pressed against some part of George's leg, under the covers. George didn't pull away—his leg pressed back, against Dream's, instead. He itched for more.

"Question," Dream murmured. George hummed, to show he was listening. "What'd your text mean?"

George went quiet for a long pause, then scoffed. "Dream," was all he said, not explaining further.

Dream squinted at him. "What?"

George shook his head. "You must know."

"I don't?" Dream said, phrasing the sentence like a question. George raised an eyebrow at him. He relented. "Well. I have an idea."

"Of course you do," George said, lip turned upwards. "Whatever your idea is, it's right."

Dream watched George carefully. "How d'you know we're thinking the same thing?"

A pause. Echoing Dream's earlier words, George went, breathing out: "I just know you."

They fell quiet, looking at each other with sleepy expressions, speaking with dead silence, knowing there was a conversation brewing between them. Under the blankets, Dream poked at George's leg with his toes, repeatedly, until George giggled, quietly. Dream smiled, eyes soft.

"Why are we so weird?" Dream asked next, tired of making sense of how they acted with each other. He hoped George understood why he asked; he liked to think he would, that he got it.

George smiled, turning his face into his pillow, still watching Dream with one eye. "What do you mean by that?"

The moon was even brighter now, directly in line of his window, shining over both of their faces. Dream could see every expression, every curve of his mouth, every arch of his eyebrow.

Taking a page from George's book, Dream repeated what he'd said earlier. "You must know."

George's hand slithered under the duvet, meeting the bare, heated skin of Dream's wrist. He held it, wrapping his fingers around it, resting there, unmoving. A small touch which branded him.

Softly, George said, "I think I do."

And then, it left Dream's mouth before he even realized what had happened. "Do you ever think about it?"

"About what?" George asked, so fast that Dream wondered if he understood what he'd meant, but there was a tonal distinction he could hear, if he listened closely enough. Only people that really knew George would probably be able to recognize it, and Dream was one of those people. George could tell where the conversation was going. And Dream had known, before he entered the room that night, that one of them would bring it up.

He hadn't thought he'd be the one with the courage to do it, though. He hadn't thought he'd have the guts.

"Y'know," Dream began, hesitating for a brief moment. He let his impulses take over, giving in. "If people are right."

People, he phrased it vaguely. Right about what, he didn't explain; it was obvious, even if left unsaid.

"People?" George asked, though he hadn't said it as much of a question, and Dream knew he was playing dumb.

"I dunno," he said, quietly, and took the plunge: "The fans? Our friends?"

George laughed, slightly.

"The fans don't know anything," he addressed first, almost in tired amusement from Dream's line of questioning, how he'd chosen to bring up the topic. He was the only person in the world that Dream could have this conversation with without it being uncomfortable. Dream was scared, of course he was, but he wasn't *uncomfortable*. It felt easy, talking about this with him, now that they'd begun to put it out there.

"Well, I know *that*," Dream said, "but still. I... I dunno."

George's fingers squeezed around their place on Dream's wrist. They went silent again, for a minute this time, blinking at each other. And then, George's eyes flickered to Dream's mouth, and he went still, knowing. And he couldn't help but let his eyes stray to George's lips either, now that they were both being so shameless about it, so obvious.

Suddenly, Dream felt awake. Suddenly, Dream thought he should be alert, and understood why they were looking at each other like this.

Suddenly, he felt ready.

George breathed out eventually, audibly, adjusted himself to look at Dream properly. "Stop thinking so hard. I can *hear* you thinking."

Dream breathed a laugh, sick with nerves. "Surprised you didn't ask what I'm thinking."

George closed his eyes. Opened them, after a few seconds, and they were brighter than before, braver. "I know what you're thinking," he said, with such lightness it made Dream's chest hurt, with such nonchalance that Dream wondered if George thought about the consequence of saying it out loud. He paused, then admitted, "I'm thinking it, too."

Goosebumps raised all over Dream's arms. "You are?"

"Of course I am." Worry flashed in George's eyes. "We shouldn't, though."

His heart squeezed, painful. "Why not?"

George looked thoughtful. "It could change everything."

"Isn't that the point?" Dream asked, quiet. "It would change everything. And nothing, too."

He could hear as George swallowed. He could hear as he thought about what he'd said.

"Okay," George whispered, after a minute. "Okay."

Dream couldn't breathe. "Okay?"

George nodded, slowly, as if he'd come to a decision. "Come closer."

Dream went still, didn't move.

George tugged at his arm, in prompt. Impatient.

Dream moved closer, until the tips of their noses were nearly touching, until he was off his own pillow, some of his face rested on George's instead now. One of George's legs hooked over the back of Dream's, pulling his lower half closer, left the limb resting over his.

"George?" Dream asked, so tiny that if they hadn't been so close, George wouldn't have been able to hear it.

George's eyelashes fluttered. He moved in again, not by much. It was noticeable only because their noses were now touching. Their eyes trapped in a mutual, unrelenting gaze.

"Clay," George whispered into the night. And Dream's heart floated up inside his body, lodged its way in his throat, leaving him speechless.

The sound of his name, coming from George. He said it like he was sounding it out slowly, his name, like he meant something when he voiced it aloud. It was nothing like the other instances George had used his given name; it wasn't teasing, or flirtatious. It was serious. It was a real moment. It was everything.

George had used it in the years before they met, by request of viewers or in certain funny moments, but his lip would twitch before. It had sounded unnatural or forced, and he'd make a joke out of how it sounded. It didn't sound that way this time. It sounded like George had taken a fucking knife and cut him open, taken a shortcut to his heart. If he wanted to rip Dream open, leave him bleeding, then he'd bleed for him; if that's what he wanted, he'd do it. He'd do anything George wanted, if he said his name like that again.

Dream had never liked his name, growing up—it felt boring, like it didn't encompass all of who he was. It was why he'd come up with 'Dream', when he was so young. He'd loved the sound of it. It was *cool*. But Clay was still a huge part of him; it was who he was at his centre, who he'd be if he didn't have YouTube, fame, money, who he'd be if he had nothing, a part of him, not entirely the whole. And George said his name like he loved that part of him, like he saw that, like he loved *every* part of him. Like he loved *him*.

Was it wishful thinking, believing that?

He found his voice, after a long, few seconds. And said, as he always did: “George.”

With the exact same measurement of feeling as before, George said next, like he knew both parts of him and accepted them wholly: “*Dream.*”

Nothing had happened yet, and Dream felt destroyed.

He shivered. Anticipation had never felt so palpable to him. “Yes?” he said, voice cracking around it.

George smiled, hearing the break. Licked his lips, slowly. Then, changed their lives.

“I think you should kiss me,” George murmured, so straight-forward and blunt and *George*, looking at Dream with dark, direct, decisive eyes.

Dream didn’t know how to function, how to process such a request.

“You can’t kiss me?” was all he could bear to ask in return. He didn’t joke about it. He didn’t laugh. He didn’t ask George if he was serious, because he didn’t need to. Everything was falling together.

“No,” George smiled, teasing and patient. He raised his chin, their mouths an inch apart. “But I do want you to kiss me.”

He made movement, and their noses slotted together, right beside each other, mouths still not touching. Dream was going to go cross-eyed, looking at George this close, but he didn’t want to blink. He didn’t want to miss a goddamn second.

“Come on, then,” George breathed, ghosting Dream’s lips, warm. “Do your worst.”

Every cell in his brain felt like it was flitting around, working twice as hard, struggling for him to attempt to regain function in his muscles. He tilted his head forwards, and brushed his lips against George’s, testing out the feeling—and George gasped, when they met.

Dream could relate to that reaction; his lips had never felt so sensitive. The relief left Dream so quickly that he got lightheaded from the rush of it. He’d done it. He’d *done it*.

The leg George had hooked around the back of Dream’s knee tightened, pulling him even closer. “C’mon, again,” George spoke, their mouths against each other, with urgency.

And so Dream kissed him again, this time harder than before. The tingles stung at his mouth; he could feel his blood racing through his ears.

Tentativeness wasn’t usually Dream’s brand of kissing, but this moment felt fragile. He needed to be careful with George. This was *important* to him. He wanted George to understand that Dream wouldn’t just kiss him, outright, like a beast—he wanted him to know he would take care of his heart, that he wouldn’t be in the wrong, trusting Dream with it.

George’s tongue slipped out, licking over their lips gently, and Dream moaned. Soon, so soon for him to do that, but Dream wouldn’t complain; he wanted it, too. “*George.*”

“More,” George demanded, kissing harder, begging for it already, Jesus Christ, “more, *more.*”

Dream tilted his head to the side, and gave him just that. He decided to be less careful, tonguing between George’s lips until they parted under the pressure, and he opened up, only for Dream to

lick into his mouth, their tongues sliding together. He cupped George's jaw with a hand, pressed down at his chin with his thumb for him to open his mouth wider for Dream.

"Oh," George whispered, as their tongues lined along each other, wet, entire body shuddering. He pressed his along Dream's teeth, feeling at his molars—such an odd thing for one to do during a first kiss, but Dream didn't care; if George wanted to know every part of him, he'd let him.

"God," Dream mumbled against George's mouth. *Oh, my god, ohmyGodohGod*. His brain was in overdrive, it couldn't stop going.

"Dream," George groaned, between presses of their lips, even though he'd barely spoken, "shut up." George's arm snaked around Dream's midsection, pulling him in even closer, so close they were completely pressed against each other now.

"You shut up," Dream shot back, kissing George even harder, like he wanted to fight him. He sucked his bottom lip between both of his, until he could hear George shuddering again.

"Stop thinking," he replied, between the slide of their lips, "and kiss me."

I'm kissing you, he thought in reply, delirious with it, and made sure George could feel the next one in his toes.

He deepened it, tasting him. George's mouth tasted *sweet*, like fucking candy. That was not normal. Dream wondered if he, himself, tasted like the mint of his toothpaste. "How do you taste this good?" he asked, needing to know if there was some bizarre secret, despite the fact that George had told him to shut up seconds before.

George giggled against his mouth, teeth going wide, and Dream accidentally kissed them next, instead of George's lips. "I had a Starburst before you came."

Dream moaned, sucking at his lips again, tasting what must be strawberry. "Of course you did," he muttered. "You're fucking *delicious*."

George's breath hitched, and he replied with a kiss so fierce it left both of their lips swollen. "Shut up."

Dream's blood was boiling, simmering under his skin, as they kept kissing. In a murmur, he asked, teasingly, "Where else do you taste good?" And he used his hand on George's face to tilt it upwards, leaned down to drag his tongue along the column of George's throat, wetly.

He listened for the hitching of George's breaths, kept licking upwards, over his Adam's apple, until he met the scratchiness of his stubble. He licked that, too.

"Everything about you is perfect," Dream breathed, returning to a spot under George's jaw, to press open-mouthed kisses into. "It's annoying as fuck."

George's hand squeezed Dream's back, near his hip. Dream wanted him to leave bruises, for the shape of gentle fingers to press down hard, until blue-black marks were on him. "Coming from you?"

Widening his mouth, he bit down at George's neck, before sucking into it, wanting to leave a hickey, wanting to make him his, a spark of possession already coursing through him. He wanted them to be each other's, once and for all. George whimpered, and one of his hands went to Dream's head, holding him in place as he sucked. He made a fisting grasp of the strands of Dream's hair with his hand, and moaned again.

Dream whimpered himself, feeling himself get half-hard, listening to how utterly gone George was beginning to sound, losing himself in what they were doing. “Stop making those *sounds*,” he pleaded, not truly meaning it, nipping at his throat again.

George half-laughed, half-groaned. “Why?”

Dream soothed his tongue over the mark he’d left. “You’re making me—”

He stopped himself. Too soon. Then, pulled back up to kiss George again, their lips pressed against each other, over and over, hoping he wouldn’t ask him to complete the train of thought, wanting to distract him with the languid motions of his mouth.

However, George always noticed. He always knew. “Finish,” George asked, between kisses. “Say it.”

Low, hoarse, so disorderly that it slipped out, he admitted, “You’re making me hard.”

George gasped at the words, leg tugging at Dream again, trying to pull him even closer, if that was even possible. At this angle, he couldn’t feel his cock, hard in his sweatpants, though; part of Dream was angled downwards, pressed more into the mattress than anything else. When George realized this, he whined, “Lemme feel it.”

Dream would’ve laughed, if it hadn’t sounded so hot. Instead, he shivered, bit down at George’s lip. “You’re dirty,” he said, accusingly, loving it, wanting to learn even more about how George was when he was like this. Wanting to know every part of him he had yet to share, when they were simply friends.

“Yeah,” George agreed, like he didn’t even *care* about what he was admitting to. Dream reached around, dragged his palms over the planes of George’s back, covered in his thin sleep shirt. “Let me feel it, please, just—”

Dream passed his hands over George’s ass, and he pushed back into them, like he liked it. Like he wanted Dream to touch him there more, again, harder.

“You want me?” he whispered, against George’s cheek. Dream shifted his body upwards, rearranged them a little and gripped below, at the meat of George’s thigh. He pulled it, pushed it between his own legs, his cock now pressed against the muscles of George’s legs, slotted between them, rolling upwards so George could press into him if he wanted to. “You have me.”

A slow grind started between them, testing out the movements.

“Fuck,” they muttered, at the same time, and then Dream shifted himself so he could feel George’s dick there too, against his own leg. George moved his mouth back on his, letting their hips roll into each other, grinding with their bodies. Alone, Dream moaned, saying, “fuck, *fuck*, press harder, yeah, like that—”

“Holy shit, Dream,” George breathed, after pulling back to say it, and he rolled upwards and over, so that half of his body was now on top of Dream’s, held him in place and kissed him even harder now that he was hovering above him. Their dicks brushed against each other, he could feel the hard, thick shape of him against the length of his own, despite the fact that they were both still fully clothed.

He felt positively feverish, a sheen of sweat covering him.

Dream was enamoured with this man. He’d never felt like this with another person before, had

never been overcome with such raw desperation.

So desperate to be together that they were rutting against each other like they'd never done this before. So desperate that they couldn't bother to take the time to remove their clothes. He didn't feel like a man in his twenties—he felt young, and charged, and fucking *obsessed*. Infatuated.

It was glorious. He'd never believed himself to exist with this kind of want inside of him but then George—God, George was addictive. Dream was addicted. The taste of his lips, the salted skin of his neck, the roughness of his motions, the solid line of him in his pajamas, pressed against Dream, their cocks brushing along one another. He wondered, briefly, if he'd ever feel like this again. If it was just a one time thing, because this was their first time. He didn't think their other times would be like this too, he knew this would happen many times again, now that they'd allowed it to happen, but he knew in his bones that this was special. To live in the moment, and savour it.

George whined, rutting upwards, and Dream grinded back, kissed him again, let their mouths open up against each other, let them breathe together.

“Baby,” he breathed, against George's lips, so broken. Sounding out the word. And it fit everything he felt for George so well, so much that he knew he'd be using it again. “*Baby*.”

“Fuck,” he sobbed, and kissed him again. Dream gripped at his ass, holding him in place, holding them together. George groaned, saying, “You're good at this.”

“You're *hot* like this,” Dream replied, strained, between movements. “I feel like I—like I haven't been touched in, in,” Dream breathed slower, gathering his bearings, unable to finish his statement.

“Can you come from this?” George asked, wondrous, breathless. Dream could feel his dick, insistently pressing into his own, and his eyes rolled back in his head. “Can you—can you come by just—”

“Yes,” Dream knew immediately, knew that he could, that he was already close it, “fuck, yes, I'm so—”

“Wanna see it,” George murmured, moving in to kiss him, licking into his mouth and George's tongue was all over his when he breathed out, “wanna see you make a mess for me.”

“Oh, my fucking,” Dream panted, mouth open, kissing George back with a wildness that possessed him. “Jesus, fuck, *fuck*.”

How did George know all his buttons? They'd never had sex before, they'd never even *talked* about having sex before. How did he know what Dream liked? How did he know what Dream liked to hear? *How did he know?*

Was it possible to like someone so much you felt sick with it? That it made you ill? He wanted to live inside of George, for George to live inside him for eternity. He wanted to breathe him in, to absorb every inch of him. He wanted this feeling to consume them both; he already felt consumed by it, because—

He loved him, he realized, with a start. He was fucking *in love* with this man. He was in love with George. How had he been so stupid? How had he not seen it? And the craziest part was that he'd always been in love with him, hadn't he? For years. For so long that he couldn't remember not feeling like this towards him.

Because this love that he felt for him wasn't new, not at all—it had been planted in his heart from the second they became good friends, and expanded, grew, evolved over the years, up until now.

He'd been a godforsaken liar, for ages, and whether he'd subconsciously known and repressed it he had yet to understand.

Now, his entire heart was George.

He'd never love like this again; he was certain of it.

"I've never felt like this in my life," Dream admitted, into George's skin, eyes stinging from the urge to cry. He pulled back, locked eyes with him, and then, as he rolled his hips again, breathed out, an honest, binding, relieving confession: "I am so fucking in love with you."

George's lips parted from shock. He shuddered—lips bitten and swollen and open, the pink of his tongue was visible if Dream looked close enough—and he came. Dream felt it, in the stutter of his movements, the whine that left his mouth, the shaking along his limbs.

Dream gasped, slowing his movements, so surprised. "Did you—?"

George didn't say a thing, didn't let him say a thing. He leaned over and gave him the slowest, sweetest, dirtiest kiss Dream had ever received in his life. Wet and all-encompassing. Like he wanted to *devour* him. Like Dream had just given him the greatest gift on the planet. And all Dream had done was be impulsive, and honest, and felt so much that it burst out of him seconds after coming to the realization, but George was rewarding him for that, he was thanking him for it.

"Dream," George mumbled against his cheek, his hand sneaking down to touch him through his pants, gripping his cock, hard in his sweats, wrapped around the head.

Dream moaned. George tightened around him, squeezing, feeling it jump against his hand. "Yes?" he asked, voice hoarse.

George moved to Dream's ear, and whispered into it, "I'm crazy about you."

Dream's heart split open. "You—you are?"

"Dream," he said again, and Dream could hear the smile in his tone. He loved it when he said his name. George kissed his jaw, beneath his ear, with a wet, open mouth. "I've been in love with you forever."

"*Oh*," Dream breathed out, and his muscles began shaking, the surprise of the reveal and the feel of George's hand around his cock, and his orgasm took him by surprise, hitting him out of nowhere. He felt like he'd been lit on fire, burning along every inch of himself, then consequently shoved under water, drowning in it. All of his senses went alert. He'd never felt more alive. George's hand was around Dream's dick, over his clothes, as he came, he could *feel* Dream getting wet under his clothes, the come pressed into George's palm, between his clothes and the skin of his hand. It was disgusting, it was perfect—it was so them, he wouldn't have asked for anything else.

"God," George breathed out, when it was over, staring at Dream's face, lips parted. "Oh, shit."

Dream pressed his forehead against George's. Kissed him again, lovingly, slowly. Put every piece of his soul in it. Kissed him until their lips were swollen again, warm and hypersensitive, until George pulled back to breathe against Dream's cheek, laying with him. Silent.

They didn't speak for a long while, comfortable in their lack of conversation. Revelling in how things had spiralled out of control. Rejoicing in how little it mattered, because they both had wanted it, and Dream knew they'd both continue wanting it for as long as they could.

Unbearably, though, there was a voice that echoed in Dream's mind, not letting him forget.

I've been in love with you—

forever,

forever,

forever.

Dream breathed out. Gave in. "Can I ask a question?" he asked, already hurting in advance, eyes firmly shut. A serial self-sabotager.

He could hear the smile in George's voice when he replied, voice still hoarse from their earlier activities, "You don't normally ask permission."

"Shut up," Dream said softly. Then, even though it felt painful to ask: "Were you waiting for me a long time?"

George went dead silent. A little too quiet, for a long time. Dream opened his eyes, watched him, nervous, and George nuzzled against Dream's face, which put him more at ease. "Yes," George admitted, "but it's fine."

Dream ached, with frustration and sadness. The longing, it had eaten at them both; Dream had felt it, himself, for a while. But for George, it had been longer. "Not fine."

"Relax," George said, too nonchalant, but Dream knew that it must've been torturous, yearning in silence. He knew him, even the parts he was too scared to share.

"Don't lie to me," Dream said, in a tiny voice. But he kissed George's cheek, still. "Not now. Not about this."

"Dream, it's okay," George repeated, with patience. He was so *patient*. Dream wanted him to get mad, for once, for him to be furious. "I promise you, I was fine. Your friendship was enough."

Dream looked at George, heart hollow and full, and then George reached up to touch Dream's face with purpose, thumb along his cheek, near his eye. When he pulled his hand back, Dream looked down, and—George's fingers were glistening.

Dream was crying. When had he started crying?

"It's okay," George repeated, softly. Shaking his head at Dream for being emotional, smiling through it. "It's *okay*."

"I'm sorry," Dream told him, begging for forgiveness even though George had already given it to him, desperate, devastated and in love.

"You don't need to apologize, idiot," George said, gently. "Maybe I should've told you, or something. But..." he went quiet for a few seconds, and Dream waited for him to speak. "It wasn't time. Not then."

Dream cupped his face. "It's time, now?" he asked, despite already knowing the answer. He could see it in George's eyes, could feel it in how he kissed him, could hear it in how he spoke.

George reached up to hold Dream's hand against his cheek, then picked it up, brought it to his lips. "Hold me," George requested, kissing his fingers. "We have this now, so shut up and just... love

me like you want to.” *Like I’ve always wanted you to*, he didn’t say, but Dream heard it in his voice, loud and clear. And they were intertwined, he could hear his heart pounding with such might that it could’ve been his own, but it wasn’t; it was George’s, his heart, which was Dream’s now, too.

“You’re incredible,” Dream told him, thinking of all the times he’d wanted George, and not recognized he wanted him back. Thinking of all the times George had wanted him, without him knowing.

George laughed, and kissed him. Kept kissing him. For so long, that time stopped being real.

Milestone after milestone, award after award. Their lives were changing faster than either of them could have ever predicted. Their heads spun in harmony, voices shaking with excitement over the phone, as they discussed what was to come next.

Dream was exhausted, but he didn’t want to fall asleep. He wanted to talk to George for days on end. He never wanted to forget this moment—the moment he realized that this was only the beginning for them both. And that, in itself, was an earth-shattering concept to have awareness of.

In a quiet voice, he told George—who laid in his own bed, a thousand miles away—a tired confession: “I think you changed my life.”

George went silent. Dream could hear him breathing over the line, evening out.

“You definitely changed mine,” George eventually said, gently, and Dream had never heard him sound like this in his life. “And I’ll never be able to thank you enough for it.”

An hour went by. Dream was too afraid to shut his eyes. He didn’t want to sleep. He wanted to live in this moment until death.

Earlier, they’d sat up in bed, and George had crawled over him, sitting between his legs, half on his lap, giving him kisses. Rested his head on Dream’s shoulder, as Dream let his hands roam aimlessly, along George’s back, his thighs, his arms. And Dream had put his hands in George’s hair, felt the softness of it between his fingers, pulled at it until he’d heard his breath sharpen—and George had laughed at him, kissed him again, biting at his mouth with the blunt ends of his teeth.

He looked at George, whose body had moulded into his own, and thought: *I feel your heart inside of me. You’ve been here for years. How did I not notice? How did I not know? I can feel it beating. Here.* He picked up George’s hand, resting it over his chest, where he could feel the pulsating thuds of his own heartbeat. *Listen. Do you hear it? That’s yours. It’s always been yours.*

Every inch of him trembled.

“I don’t know how to show you how much I love you,” Dream admitted, overwhelmed, needing George to understand. Needing him to feel everything Dream was feeling tonight.

“Dream,” George murmured, near his neck. “I *know*.” George picked up his hand, kissed the tips

of his fingers, each knuckle on his hand. “Trust me. I know.”

Dream swooped down to kiss his mouth again, to feel the shape of it on his own.

“Never stop kissing me,” George begged against his lips. “Please, please.”

“Whatever you want,” Dream murmured, between kisses, “anything you want.”

A pause, a smirk against his mouth. “Is that a promise?”

Dream smiled at his tone. “I cannot promise that to you,” he said, because George was the kind of person to take such a promise and turn it into a threat. “You’d ask for the world.”

George created space between them, pulled back to shoot him a knowing look. “You’d give me the world, if you could.”

It was true, but he didn’t need to say that out loud. He nipped at George’s bottom lip lightly, tugging it with his teeth. “I hate you.”

“You love me,” George mumbled, thumb brushing over Dream’s cheek, and then with gentleness, “and I love you.” And Dream had to kiss him again for that; he might die if he didn’t.

He felt so much for him, he couldn’t believe all of it could fit in his body. It felt like it was almost threatening to burst out of him. “I do,” Dream told him. He’d spent so long refusing to admit it, that now that he was able, he wanted to speak it as much as he could.

The lights were off in George’s bedroom, but their eyes had adjusted to the light level a long time ago. The moon still filtered through the curtains, wide-open, white and blinding and beautiful.

He would love him, Dream decided then, proudly. So loud and so quiet that he’d become nothing but his adoration.

He’d never be quiet about how much he loved George again. He’d be loud; he’d love him with a loudness that deafened those around them. Perhaps then it’d be enough. Perhaps then he’d be sufficiently satisfied.

But, thinking back on everything they’d been through, he knew that there was a power in staying quiet as well. There was importance in the unspoken. Even though they’d taken long to admit these secrets to each other, the feelings that they’d buried until they no longer couldn’t, nothing had changed in how Dream loved. And nothing had changed in how loved he felt by George, either.

The only thing that had changed was what they allowed themselves to feel. What they allowed themselves to do.

There was bravery in revelation, but there was understanding in silence, as well.

Maybe it had been okay that he’d taken so long to get here. Maybe they had needed the time. Maybe this was how it was meant to be all along.

Tonight, he’d love him in the dark—their lips pressed together as one, their bodies entangled with each other, the same as their careers, their lives, their futures—and when the sun rose the next morning, he’d love him in the light, too.

+me, elsewhere:

twitter: [falsettodrop](#) | tumblr: [falsettodrop](#), [viewsfromthestyx](#).

If you enjoyed this, I'd really love to hear your thoughts!

Beautiful art drawn for this story by these talented people:

- the kitchen scene, by Lee: [twitter](#), [tumblr](#).
- the confession scene, by Milktea: [twitter](#), [tumblr](#).

Thank you to everyone who read along, and for the love I received while writing. You were kind as hell as I updated, and I'm glad it's finally complete; I'm proud of myself for being fairly diligent with the updates. I hope the final chapter was a sufficient ending to this ride. :')

Deserved thank you's to my friends who cheered me on while I wrote this! Every one of you: the writers who gave me encouragement, my friends reading, and of course, my two supportive group chats (one which beta-read for every update, making it better, and the other who I spent countless hours talking about DNF with, to the point where various subjects we discussed ended up in here). I love you guys a lot. <3 my absolute beloveds.

I will be writing more in this fandom. Keep a look out! :D I have ideas, of course, and I won't just be limiting myself to this ship, hint hint. (But also: they have a hold on me. I have to admit.) You will see me again, surely. Hit the subscribe button on the author page, maybe.

All chapter title lyrics credited from:

- from miles away [Passionfruit (BBC Radio 1 Live Lounge Cover), Paramore]
- and there's no rest [Thinking About You, Radiohead]
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